

THE ARGOSY

DECEMBER 1900

THE WARDEN OF THE MARCHES

BY SYDNEY C. GRIER, AUTHOR OF "PEACE WITH HONOUR,"
"THE KINGS OF THE EAST," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ABDICATION

MAB, are you awake?"

"Go away, I hate you!" was the muffled reply. Mabel had thrown herself, dressed, upon her bed, and her face was buried in the pillow. She shook off Flora's hand angrily from her shoulder as she spoke.

"Why, Mab, I only wanted to tell you—— What have I done?"

Mabel sat up and pushed back her hair. "They let you go and help with him," she said venomously, "and they kept me out. Dick called you—I heard him myself. And they wouldn't let me come. Eustace held my hands. And you went—and helped them."

"I didn't do anything but hold things for them, really. Dr. Tighe did it all, and your brother helped him. I had to go when they called me."

"Did he look at you—recognise you? If he did, I'll never forgive you."

"No, not a bit. But, Mab——"

"I'm glad of that, at any rate. And you came to say I might go to him now?"

"Yes, Mr. Burgrave spoke to Dr. Tighe. But don't say you're glad he didn't look at me. It will make you miserable all your life even to have thought it."

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Mabel impatiently, as Flora barred her way to the door.

"I can't let you go into the room without realising it. His—his hair is all burnt off, Mab, and he's fearfully scorched. You can't see anything but bandages, and he is quite insensible."

"It's only the shock. He must come round soon."

"That's not all. I must tell you. The explosion seems to have paralysed all his faculties. He is deaf and dumb and blind—for the time."

"Oh, for the time, of course. But he won't be deaf when I speak to him. Don't keep me here, Flora. I want to help him to wake."

Flora drew back reluctantly, and Mabel ran across the courtyard. At the door of the sick-room, which was a makeshift structure erected since the earthquake at the corner where two verandahs joined, she met Dr. Tighe.

"So I hear you want to play at nursing a little, Miss North?" he said, not unkindly, but by no means as if he regarded her intention in a serious light. "Do you think you won't fall asleep? Can you keep cool, whatever happens? Not that you could do much harm if you went into hysterics," he added, half to himself. "The poor fellow wouldn't be disturbed."

Even this slighting estimate of her powers did not provoke Mabel to protest. "What have I to do?" she asked, with determined calmness, and the doctor looked at her curiously.

"I want you to sit beside him and watch for any sound or movement. If there is the least change, send for me at once. I must spend the night over at the hospital, but I am leaving my boy in the verandah here, and he will fetch me whenever you want me."

"Wait, please. May I speak to him?"

"Who—the boy? Oh, the patient. Yes, of course, as much as you like, if it will ease your mind. Didn't I tell you that he couldn't hear you?" He glanced sharply at her, but she turned away from him, and went into the room without saying anything, leaving him puzzled. "I feel a bit of a brute," he said to himself, as he crossed to the passage leading into the hospital, "but she must keep up. I don't want her on my hands in hysterics, in addition to all the rest."

Mabel sat down quietly beside the bed. A smoky native lamp spread a flickering light through the little room, rendering dimly visible the swathed figure which lay absolutely motionless in its shroud of bandages. Of the face nothing could be seen, and the bandaged hands were stretched straight at the sides. A great terror seized Mabel. Surely he must be dead? She laid her hand timidly on the wrist nearest her, so lightly as scarcely to touch it, but the contact served to reassure her. He was still living, and she resigned herself to her silent and solitary watch.

At first she was so much absorbed in listening and looking for the sounds and movements which never came, that she had no thought of her surroundings, but after a time they forced themselves upon her notice. The deathlike silence all around, the presence of that shrouded form upon the bed, the uncertain light—all combined to strain her nerves to their utmost tension. She would have risen and walked about, in the hope of breaking the spell, but she discovered that she

was too much terrified to move. The semi-darkness was full of shadows for which she could not account, and small mysterious noises sounded in her ears like thunder-claps. Over and over again she thought she saw her patient move, only to find that her eyes had deceived her, and the breathless expectation did but increase the strain upon her. By degrees her terror grew almost uncontrollable, but she fought against it doggedly. Never in her life had she placed such restraint upon herself. The door was so near, two steps would take her to it, and once outside she would be safe from the shadows and the silence. But she gripped her chair hard with both hands, and at last the impulse passed away. Next came the temptation to scream—to shriek, sing, do anything to break the stillness. She was shaking from head to foot; it seemed utterly impossible to check her sobs, yet she succeeded in crushing them down. The struggle was a fearful one, and she felt that her self-command would not hold out much longer. She looked at her watch, and resolved to remain quiet for five minutes, whatever happened. When the five minutes was over, she renewed the resolution for another five minutes, and so on, and the expedient was successful for a time. Then it became more and more difficult to maintain, and the periods of five minutes dwindled to four, three, and finally one. She gazed at the watch aghast. It was impossible that so much agony and mental stress could have been crowded into one minute. But the watch had not stopped, and she gave up the conflict, and burst into tears.

"Fitz!" she wailed, dropping on her knees beside the bed. "Fitz!"

Surely he would hear. Georgia had said that Dick's voice would reach her if she were dead. But here there was no answer.

"Oh, Fitz, speak to me!" she entreated. "I am so frightened."

The piteous voice died away. It must have availed to pierce the silence which enwrapped him, she thought, and yet he would not speak. Could it be that he was resolved to punish her for her coldness in the past, to humble her pride in return for all she had made him suffer? Or perhaps he did not understand even yet.

"Fitz," she murmured softly, "I love you."

No sooner had the words escaped her lips than she sprang up aghast. They seemed to be echoed back by the walls on every side, to be whispered by mocking sprites, to clang like the strokes of great bells. "I love you! I love you!" The air was full of them, and she was overwhelmed with shame.

"Oh, if you don't hate me, say just one word!" she sobbed. "I am so ashamed, but you said you loved me. Oh, Fitz, it's not like you to be so unkind! And I thought you would be glad to know."

Surely he must answer now; but she sobbed on, and there came no word of comfort.

"Well, Miss North, and what's all this about?" said Dr. Tighe.

He stood at the door, looking in at her, and Mabel sprang to her feet and confronted him, shaking with sobs, her face stained with tears.

"It's—it's only—I was speaking to him, and he won't answer," she managed to say.

"But I told you he wouldn't. He can't. Why, he doesn't even hear you."

"I thought I could make him hear."

"As well try to wake the dead. No, no; what an idiot I am!" as she recoiled from him in terror. "Purely a figure of speech, nothing more. Now I will take a turn of watching, and do you go and get some rest."

"Oh no, I won't leave him. I am not a bit tired."

"Go to Mrs. North. She can't sleep either, and she and her ayah have got some coffee for you. It will soon be daylight, and you had better rest while you can."

"As if I should think of leaving him!" repeated Mabel in scorn.

"I won't be defied by my own nurses, Miss North. If you don't go peaceably, I'll have you gently assisted out, and once outside this room you won't get in again."

"Oh, how can you be so unkind?" sobbed Mabel, breaking down abjectly.

"I am not unkind. I want you to help me a great deal with the poor fellow, and that's why I insist upon your resting now. You shall come on duty again in four hours or so, and I'll promise faithfully to call you if there's any change in the meantime."

Slowly and reluctantly Mabel left the room, and went along the verandah to Georgia's door. Georgia was sitting up in a cane chair, and welcomed her cheerfully.

"Come in, Mab. It seems absurdly early to be up, but I knew how cold and miserable you would feel after being awake all night. This is the very last of the coffee. Dr. Tighe has lavished it upon us recklessly on the chance of our being relieved to-day, so make the most of it."

"I couldn't touch it, Georgie!" with a gesture of disgust.

"Oh yes, you can, to please me. After you have drunk it you shall lie down on my bed, and if you can't sleep, we will talk. Why, you are shivering! Put on that shawl, and now drink the coffee," and Mabel obeyed.

"Let me stay here, Georgie," she said when she had finished, sitting down on the floor, and laying her head on Georgia's knee. "I like to be close to you. You understand things." Georgia stroked her hair softly, and she went on, "Other people don't understand—even Flora, or Dr. Tighe. And Dick was horrid last night. The only person who seems to know how I feel is poor Eustace—he understands."

"Yes, he has suffered himself."

"And that is my fault. But I never knew how it hurt till now,

Georgie, or I couldn't have done it, and now that I do know, it's too late. I know now how you feel about Dick, because of what I feel about Fitz. I can't bear any one else to do a single thing for him, and if he returned to consciousness while I was away, I should be ready to kill Dr. Tighe. Isn't it strange that to-day I would give anything to hear him say the things that made me so angry a little while ago, and that I have said things in his ear to-night that would have made him perfectly happy then, and now he can't even hear them? Oh, Georgie, if he should never hear them—if he should die without recovering his senses!"

"We can only hope—and pray," said Georgie gently.

"I know, but you must pray—I can't. You have always been kind to him, at any rate; I haven't. I don't deserve that he should get well, I know—but I do want him so much. When I think that he has been wasting his love upon me all this time, while I was too proud to take it, I feel it would serve me right if I never had the chance of telling him how glad and thankful I am to have it. But I do love him, Georgie, indeed I do."

"I know you do, Mab," said Georgie, still passing her hand softly over Mabel's hair. She would not allow a word of reproach to cross her lips, but in her heart there was a little tumult of wifely indignation. Mabel was so much engrossed with Fitz Anstruther as not even to remember that her brother had taken his life in his hand and gone straight into the enemy's camp. "But it is only natural. Perhaps I should do the same in her place," thought Georgie, and continued the pleasant restful movement. Before very long Mabel was asleep, and she was still crouched upon the floor, leaning against Georgie, when Dr. Tighe came to say that she might take her second turn of watching in the sick-room. She awoke with a start, while he was talking to Georgie in an excited whisper.

"Yes, Mrs. North, I'm certain there's something up. Two or three distinct *jirgahs* seem to be going on in the enemy's lines, and though they began to make preparations for fighting two hours ago, they don't get any forrarder. And we are almost certain that a movement of some kind is proceeding at the back of Gun Hill. There may be artillery there, taking up a position, or possibly the whole relief column is preparing to occupy the heights. If it's anything of the sort, it's all due to that marvellous husband of yours, whom I'd make viceroy this very day if I had my way."

"And he would be excessively unhappy at Government House, and the cause of extreme misery to every one else," laughed Georgie; but Mabel, who had been listening, half asleep, to their talk, sprang up.

"Oh, doctor, is there any change? Is he awake?"

"No change whatever, I'm sorry to say. Have your breakfast before you come across, and then I'll leave you in charge while I go my morning rounds in the hospital."

In a very short time Mabel was at her post again, wondering at the

horror which night and silence had lent to the rough walls of the very commonplace little room. The full blaze of sunlight never reached this particular corner of the courtyard until late in the afternoon, but the hole which had been left as a window admitted a certain amount of light. Through it also there came pleasantly the distant sounds of life and movement from the other parts of the fort. As Mabel sat with her eyes fixed upon the bed, the murmur of different sounds lulled her into a state very nearly resembling sleep, and once again she thought she saw a movement, only to discover that it was merely fancy. Another period of intense vigilance passing gradually into semi-consciousness followed, the mere effort of concentrating her gaze on one point inclining her to slumber, and then there came a sudden awakening. Was it thunder, or another earthquake, or what could be the cause of those tremendous crashes, each of which was welcomed by cries of delight from the walls?

"Guns, I suppose," said Mabel to herself, still half asleep. "Perhaps it will wake him." She bent forward eagerly, but there was still no movement, and she sat down again disappointed. The crashes and the shouts of joy overhead still continued, but she made no attempt to learn what was going on, not so much from reluctance to leave her post as from sheer lack of interest. Suddenly there came a different sound, a singing, shrieking noise, deepening into a groan as it came nearer. She had never heard it before, and yet she knew by instinct what it meant.

"A shell!" she cried, springing up involuntarily. However long she may live, she will never remember that moment without a blush of bitter humiliation, for she sprang up to run away. But the impulse was only momentary. Even before she could turn towards the door a rush of incredulous shame swept over her and made her throw herself on her knees by the bed. She clasped one of the bandaged hands in hers to give herself courage. "I will die with him!" she said, and burying her face in the coverlet, waited. It seemed to her that she waited for hours, and yet only the minutest fraction of time can have elapsed between her recognition of the character of the sound and the concussion which followed—a deafening, rending noise, which seemed to comprise within itself all imaginable sounds of terror, and which was intensified a hundredfold by the echoes it evoked from the walls of the fort. To Mabel it felt as if the world was coming to an end, and she was being buried alive in the ruins, but at this point she lost consciousness, and knew no more until she found Dr. Tighe and Flora dashing water into her face, rubbing her hands, and using various other means to revive her. Her first impression was of a blaze of intense light, and it only dawned upon her gradually that the roof of the room and the two walls facing the courtyard were gone, their shattered fragments lying in heaps around.

"I'll never forgive myself!" cried Dr. Tighe frantically. "What business had I to be trespassing upon the walls, just to watch the

practice our fellows were making, and leaving my patients to be killed without me? The moment I saw the Nalapuri horse trying to escape across the canal, and the gun on the hill slewed round to cover them, I said, 'We'll have a shell dumped into us in another minute,' and sure enough we had."

"What was it, then?" asked Mabel feebly.

"Thank God you're alive yet! 'Twas one of our own shells that fell short, and as nearly as possible wrecked the whole place. I made sure you were done for when Miss Graham and I got you out."

"Oh, but what of him—is he safe?" cried Mabel, starting up and pushing her way into the corner where the bed stood. Its position had protected it to a wonderful extent from the falling timbers of the roof and walls, but it was covered with smaller fragments, and enveloped in a haze of dust which was only now dispersing. But Mabel cared nothing for the dust or falling plaster.

"He's talking!" she shrieked to Dr. Tighe, who followed her, stumbling over the rubbish on the floor. "Hush, oh, hush! I must hear what he says."

Dr. Tighe held his breath, and Flora quickly waved back the curious servants and others who had been attracted to the spot by the bursting of the shell, and withdrew with them out of earshot. Mabel, kneeling beside the bed, was listening hungrily to the words which poured from the patient's lips, not spoken with any apparent difficulty, but rattled off in quick low tones.

"Awfully good job those Sikh fellows are making such a noise on the wall. I'm sure I dislodged something then, but I didn't hear it fall. Perhaps it fell on our friend down below. Rather a startler for him, but he'll be waiting for me. Hope he looks in the wrong place. This is the best point to drop from, I should think. Hope and trust there are no sharp bricks and things to come down upon. It's creepy work. One, two, three, and away! So far, so good. Now to stalk our friend. If he's trying to stalk me at the same moment, our heads will probably meet with a bang. I'll have my knife out—revolver would be too risky. Ah—h—h—h—what's that? The powder-bag, I'll swear; but I thought it was the man. Now if only I knew where you are at this moment, my friend, I would drag your bags to a safe distance, and give you a nice little hunt for them. But it would be awkward if you came on me from behind, so I'll wait here. Wonder if my eyes shine in the dark like a cat's? That would give him rather a turn; he might think it was a tiger. Hullo! back already, are you, and another lot of powder too? Now if you'll only leave it behind you, and retire gracefully for the moment, we'll whip it up over the wall in no time, and requisition it for her Majesty's service. Oh, that's it, is it? Well, you are a cool hand, I must say, to make your bed on a heap of powder-bags! But I can't stay watching you until you choose to make a move. I might sneeze, you know, so I'm afraid I must trouble you. Now then! just hand over that knife. Oh,

that's your little game, is it? This is not playing fair. Firearms not allowed on any account. I say!"

There was a pause, a sigh, and the voice went on again.

"I never guessed these bricks would be so knobby. It's rather rough negotiating them without any boots. Awfully good job those Sikh fellows are making such a noise on the wall. I'm sure I dislodged something then——" Mabel lifted an agonised face to the doctor.

"He's saying the same things over again. What does it all mean?"

"He is going over the last two or three minutes before the explosion. I suppose the thoughts and impressions of that time have fixed themselves in his mind, which seems to have been set working again by the shock of the bursting shell. Very likely he will go on like this."

"What! Always?" cried Mabel, in horror.

"We'll hope not, though I have known cases in which the effect of such a shock has been permanent. The brain seems unable ever to receive any other impression afterwards. But he can't well go on talking at this rate long, and when he's exhausted he may sink into a stupor, and emerge in a more rational state of mind. I wonder whether his hearing has returned. Anstruther!"

There was no answer. "You try," said the doctor.

"Fitz!" cried Mabel, her tone sharpened by anxiety, but the low monotonous voice rambled on, and there was no response to be discerned.

"We can't do anything. He must go on until he is tired," said Dr. Tighe. "And you had better go on the sick-list yourself, Miss North. You're a good deal knocked about."

To her astonishment, Mabel found that this was the case. Bruises and flesh-wounds of which she had not been conscious were painfully evident on her arms and shoulders, and her dress was torn in a dozen places. But she refused to leave her post until the time Dr. Tighe had appointed her was over; and perceiving that she would not be able to rest while Fitz was in this state, he consented to do what he could for her on the spot, and allowed her to remain for the present. It was almost more heart-rending to listen to the often-repeated story of the last few minutes of consciousness Fitz had known, than it had been to see him lying silent, but she remained at her post until the low hurrying tones became intermittent, and finally ceased altogether. By this time the servants had contrived, by means of screens and loose boards, partially to repair, or at least to conceal, the dilapidation of the room, for Dr. Tighe declined to attempt the removal of the patient, assuring Mabel cheerfully that he was in the safest place in the fort. Even if the relieving column should chance to drop in a few more shells, all the probabilities were against their falling in the same spot. Thus assured, Mabel consented to allow her own hurts to be looked to, and swallowed with unexpected docility the draught which the doctor gave her. She did so the more readily that she began to be conscious she

could not keep up much longer. The vigil and terror of the night, the alarm and anxiety of the day, seemed to have robbed her of every vestige of strength, and she had no mind to allow herself to be ousted from the post which was hers by right. If she was to continue in charge of Fitz, she must contrive to get the doctor on her side, and not alienate him by opposition to his orders.

This time she had no difficulty in obtaining rest. Her eyes closed almost as soon as she threw herself on her bed, and she slept without waking until the evening. When at length she awoke, she sprang up in alarm. Why had no one called her? It was actually getting dark, and the court-yard looked utterly deserted. What had happened? She threw on her dress, and ran along the verandah to the sick-room. Just as she reached it, the screen which served as a door was moved aside, and Dick and Dr. Tighe came out, accompanied by a sunburnt elderly man in khaki campaigning uniform.

"My sister," said Dick laconically. "We have been taking Colonel Slaney to see Anstruther, Mab. Glad to say he thinks he'll do."

"Oh, really, really?" cried Mabel, clasping her hands, and looking at the surgeon with eyes suddenly overflowing with tears.

"Well, he'll never be much of a beauty again," was the gruff reply.

"Oh, what does that signify? His mind—will that be all right?"

"I hope so—if he can be kept from any more shocks. That shell to-day seems to have been a kill or cure business—I shouldn't recommend any more of the same sort. You were there at the time—stuck to him—eh? Very plucky thing to do. Well, you just let him alone now. Don't try to excite his feelings, or make him recognise you. Give the brain time to recover itself."

"But you are sure it will be all right? Oh, I can't thank you properly for telling me this—but he will get quite well?"

"Very ungrateful if he doesn't, with such a nurse. Don't go and wear yourself to a shadow looking after him while he's insensible. You'll need all your cheerfulness and good spirits when he recovers consciousness."

Mabel looked dumbly at Dr. Tighe. What did this warning portend? The little man answered her mute appeal with friendly alacrity.

"At the best he'll be rather badly scarred, Miss North, but we hope and trust there'll be nothing else the matter. Colonel Slaney doesn't mean to imply that you would mind the scars, or that the poor fellow would care about them for his own sake, but it's likely he will for yours."

"I see. Thank you for telling me. I shall know what to do now," said Mabel, quite calmly, though the screen trembled where her fingers were gripping it.

"Buck up, Queen Mab!" said Dick kindly, lingering behind the other two to give her an encouraging pat on the shoulder. "Never say die!"

She caught his hand and wrung it, reading in his action an apology

for his hasty speech of the night before, and he smiled at her cheerily as she disappeared behind the screen. Fitz was still lying in the state of stupor in which she had left him, and she sat down beside the bed, and tried to lay her plans for the future. As she recalled what Colonel Slaney had said, it was natural that the man himself should recur to her mind.

"Why, we must be relieved!" she said to herself. "How stupid of me never to have thought of it. Colonel Slaney belongs to the column, of course. And Dick has come back safe, too. And I took it all for granted, and nobody said anything. Where can Georgie be—and Flora?"

Wondering again at the calm way in which the three men had ignored the almost incredible fact of the ending of the siege, she tried to recall her conversation with them, in order to see whether any allusion had been made to it, and suddenly remembered what had struck her vaguely at the time, the stranger's manner. He had not addressed her in the way in which long experience had prepared her to be addressed; in fact, she missed the peculiar deference to which she was accustomed from the other sex.

"He spoke to me just as if I was any other woman!" she said to herself, with a *naïveté* which would have struck her as laughable in any one else. "He was kind and encouraging—patronising, almost. Do I look very dreadful, I wonder?" She cast a puzzled glance at her limp cotton gown. "Still, even then, it's not usually my clothes that people think about. How Dick would laugh! He'll say that the celebrated smile failed of its effect for once."

Presently an unexpected solution of the mystery occurred to her.

"Perhaps I'm getting old and ugly, and people won't care to talk to me any more. How dreadful to have to ask men to do things, instead of their rushing to do them of their own accord! It will take a long time to get accustomed to it. Oh, and perhaps Fitz won't care for me now! If he leaves off loving me just as I have found out that I love him, what shall I do? I told Georgie once that I would give anything to care for any one as she cared for Dick, but I never thought of not being loved in return. There was some fairy tale about a princess who had no heart, and could not get one without giving everything she had in exchange for it, and that's how I feel. But how dreadful to get the heart, and then find that it's not wanted! If he cares for me still, I don't mind if I never speak to another man again, but if he doesn't——!"

There was a step outside, and Flora looked cautiously round the corner of the screen, then advanced, bearing a tray.

"Oh, Mab, you must have thought we had forgotten you, you poor thing!" she murmured, in subdued tones. "But you were fast asleep when I looked into your room, and we thought it would be kinder not to wake you. We were all in the mess-room verandah to welcome General Cranstoun and the officers of the column. It was lovely to

see them come in; I did wish you were there. And they are all so kind, you can't think! As soon as ever they heard what we were reduced to, they sent their servants for all sorts of private stores, and gave us everything they could think of that we should like. Look! here's a cup of tea—strong tea—for you, with milk in it, and I have made you some sandwiches of potted meat. Isn't it good of them? And they say such nice things about the way we have stood the siege, and they are so interested in the boy, and they admire your brother and Mrs. North so much. It's delightful to hear them."

"But what has happened to the enemy?" asked Mabel.

"Oh, most of them have surrendered, but Bahram Khan and a body of horse escaped, and got safely to Dera Gul. Major North just succeeded in saving the Amir, and he's in the fort now. Part of the column has gone on to keep an eye on Dera Gul, but the rest will camp here for to-night. Some of the officers are coming in after dinner—doesn't it sound funny to say that again? You will come and talk to them, won't you?"

"I'll just come and see them—it would seem rude not to go near them after all they have done for us—but I can't leave him for long. Flora!" suddenly, "do you see anything different in me?"

"You are dreadfully pale and tired, and your dress looks as if you had put it on in a hurry, and your hair isn't very nicely done," said Flora hesitatingly. "Is that what you mean?"

"No—not quite. If—if you were a man, should you still think of me as Queen Mab?"

Flora hesitated still, then suddenly flew at Mabel, and kissed her with great vehemence. "What does it signify?" she demanded. "I shall love you just as well, and so will *he*, and lots of people will love you a great deal more. You're just as lovely really as ever you were."

"Then there is something," cried Mabel. "What is it?"

"I—I don't know, exactly. It's something gone. I have noticed it going, since—I think since Mr. Anstruther came back from looking for your brother. It was a sort of assurance—I can't think of the proper word—as if you knew that every one admired you, and you had a right to their services. Yes, that was it. It took every one captive, you know, Mab."

"And now?" asked Mabel, in a low voice.

"Now? Oh, it makes me miserable to see you. You look as if you wanted people to be kind to you, poor darling."

"Only one person," whispered Mabel. "Do you think he will?"

"As if you doubted him! Fraud! If he isn't, I'll give Fred up, and come and live with you in a hermitage. There!"

"Then I don't mind. I have lost my kingdom, and found a heart."

CHAPTER XXIV

WHAT ZEYNAB SAW

DICK, I want to speak to you. I'm sure there's something wrong."

"There'll be something wrong with you, if you rush up the steps at that rate, after being out all morning. You haven't walked back, I hope?"

"No, of course not. I had a doolie. But it's really important, Dick."

"I dare say it is, but I won't listen to a single word until you lie down in that chair and let me fan you. Now let us hear about it. You went to the Refugees' Camp as usual, and doctored all and sundry?"

It was not in the confined limits of the Memsahibs' court-yard that this conversation took place, for since the arrival of the relieving column the fort had been practically deserted, owing to its insanitary condition. As the town had also been left by the enemy in an undesirable state, most of the rightful inhabitants were under canvas for the present. Quarters had been found, however, in the large Sarai for a good many of the Europeans, who led a picnic existence in the bare mud rooms, cheered by such remnants of their household goods as they had been able to save, until the neighbourhood should quiet down, so as to enable them to return to their homes. Bahram Khan was holding out obstinately at Dera Gul, where he appeared to hold in deep contempt the devastation wrought by the besiegers' mountain-guns. They had battered his walls to pieces, but he and his garrison retired to shelters underground, whence they emerged on more than one occasion to frustrate, with considerable loss to the attacking party, attempts to carry the place by assault. Meanwhile, his followers' wives and children, who were not admitted into the fortress, had thrown themselves quite happily on the hands of the besiegers, in the calm confidence that this course would ensure their being provided with food, lodging, and medical attendance free of cost. To have despatched them, in their present unprotected condition, any distance from the British lines would merely have led to their being killed or enslaved by the tribes, and after much discussion they were gathered into a special camp, under the charge of an officer detailed for the duty, which he cursed daily. Here they were looked after in company with the native women and children who had survived the siege, and such of the townspeople as now began to reappear from mysterious hiding-places or cities of refuge. The care of their health was entrusted to Georgia, and every morning she visited the camp and prescribed for any patients that might be awaiting her. It was from one of these visits that she had just returned.

"I was making a surprise inspection of the huts, Dick—it's necessary every few days, you know—and I came to one where a number of women who have no children are quartered together. They were not expecting me, and they were just sitting or standing about. One of them was Jehanara."

"My word!" Dick sprang to his feet. "Are you certain, Georgie?"

"Quite. I never forget a face, you know, and hers is a remarkable one."

"And what did you do?"

"I pretended not to have recognised her, and our eyes did not meet, so I don't think she could have seen that I knew her. I finished the inspection, and then, when I was reporting to Major Atkinson, I asked him to arrest her at once, as I was sure she was there as a spy."

"And had she got away in the meantime?"

"Oh dear, no. When I had made Major Atkinson understand which woman I meant, he laughed at me, and said that she was certainly a spy—a spy of our own; and she had a pass signed by the General to allow her to leave the camp when she liked."

"Somebody is being made a nice fool of."

"That's what I thought. If she has come to the General, and offered to betray the fortress to him—that door, you know—and it's all a trap! He doesn't know her as we do. I thought of going to him at once, but then it struck me that he might laugh at me as Major Atkinson did, so I came back to tell you as fast as I could."

"You thought he might be like Burgrave, and dislike ladies' interfering in politics? Well, I suppose I must go myself, and fish for snubs. What I do admire in all these big chaps is their deep-rooted distrust of the man on the spot. I wonder they don't order us all out of the district before they'll deign to set foot in it."

Before very long Dick was interviewing General Cranstoun in the seclusion of his tent. To his observant eye, the General's face wore a slightly expectant, not to say conscious expression, and he went straight to the business in hand.

"I should be glad if you would authorise the arrest of an East Indian woman who calls herself Joanna Warren or Jehanara, sir. She is a secret agent of Bahram Khan's, and my wife found her secreted in the Refugees' Camp this morning."

"There is no such person in the camp," was the terse reply.

"What! has she got away already?" cried Dick. "Pardon me, but this may be a serious matter. Did she know that she was recognised?"

"I believe not. I understand that when she heard it was Mrs. North's habit to visit the camp, she considered it unwise to remain there longer."

"I wish to goodness I knew whether that was all," muttered Dick. "Is there any hope of getting hold of her still?"

"I do not know. The matter does not appear to me to lie in your province, Major North, and I am not prepared to offer you any assistance."

"Perhaps you are not aware, sir, that the woman in question is Bahram Khan's most trusted counsellor? It is generally understood that all our recent misfortunes are attributable to her influence, and I know personally that she has done an immense amount of harm."

"Perhaps you are not aware that the unfortunate woman of whom you are speaking has been for years most cruelly ill-used by Bahram Khan, and has vowed vengeance upon him in consequence? But I am not at liberty to say more upon the subject."

"No!" cried Dick, with sudden enlightenment, "because she made you promise to say nothing to me before she would utter a word. She told you that I was brutally unsympathetic, and had insulted her in her misfortunes, and that I forbade my wife to receive her?"

"These are recollections of which I should scarcely expect you to be proud, Major North." Still, the General looked uncomfortable.

"I am prouder of them than I should be of being taken in by the most cunning Jezebel in India. The woman hasn't a grain of truth in her composition."

"I have been considered a good judge of character," said General Cranstoun severely, "and I would stake my life on Miss Warren's truthfulness. She has told me something of her history, and her manner left on my mind the most extraordinary impression of impotent fury thirsting for revenge. No acting could have produced the effect."

"And so you are going to stake your life on her truthfulness? and the lives of her Majesty's troops? I see it all!" cried Dick, with growing excitement. "You are to be at the north-east corner of the Dera Gul rock with a body of picked men at a certain time, when she will open a door leading into the subterranean passages. Guided by her, you will make your way up with your detachment to the gate opening on the zigzag path, and hold it until the rest of your force comes up. Then the fortress is in your hands."

"Why—how in the world did you know this?"

"I am acquainted with the lady, you see."

"But the door—how did you hear about that?"

"I have seen it. When the place was empty, before it was restored to Bahram Khan, I explored it thoroughly."

"And you never communicated the fact of the existence of the door to me? I should have imagined that the interests of the public service would have prevailed over any slight personal jealousy——"

"I didn't mention it," said Dick, "because the door is a portion of the solid rock, and can only be opened from within. It is lifted by a complicated arrangement of weights and pulleys, and a dozen women couldn't make it stir. I should say it needed ten men at least."

The General's brow gathered blackness. "Your information would have been more valuable had it come earlier," he said. "In the circumstances, I do not feel justified in abandoning an excellent opportunity of ending this revolt, merely in view of your suspicions."

"They are certainties. Say that you and your picked men are trapped in the cave—the door works from above. The only way out is up a narrow staircase, which only one man can climb at a time, but there are holes high up through which you could be shot down in dozens. Once inside, Bahram Khan has you safe—to use as a hostage, if he likes."

"I should not feel justified in abandoning the attempt," repeated the General, "but," he added with a degree less of severity, "if you can suggest any precautions that might render success more certain, I shall be glad to consider them."

"There are to be no lights, I suppose? Then I would let every man except those in the front rank carry a block of stone. We can get them out of the ruins not far off, and if they are piled up at the sides of the doorway—I'll show the men how to do it—the door can't come right down, at any rate. Then, Jehanara has arranged with you that the rest of the force shall advance up the zigzag path at a signal from the gate? The enemy's fire commands every foot of the way, and we can't shell them to any purpose at night. But if, instead of climbing up on that side, our main body was making a determined assault with scaling-ladders upon the opposite side of the fortress, where the walls come down to the level, that would distract the attention of the garrison if you found it necessary to retire from the cave. My idea is that as soon as you are well inside, the door will go down, and you will be summoned to surrender. But the door will stick, and you will be able to retire in good order, and form outside. Then, even if the attack did not come off quite at the same moment, you would be prepared to resist the garrison if they charged, and be sheltered against their fire from above. And the best part of the plan," added Dick cunningly, "is that there is no need to break faith with Jehanara. If she means well by you, everything will go off just as you arranged, and her feelings will not be hurt by the knowledge of my base suspicions."

"Major North," said the General, holding out his hand, "I have done you an injustice. The arrangements you suggest seem to obviate all risk, and I shall be glad if you will accompany me, in order to direct the men who will carry the stones. The details of the main attack I will arrange immediately."

"Then when was the attempt to be made, sir?"

"To-night, of course. *Is* to be made, if you please."

"That was a pretty close shave!" muttered Dick to himself, when he was safely outside.

And thus it came to pass that there was yet another night in which

Georgia and Flora, unable to sleep, sat together in one of the bleak rooms of the Sarai, and held each other's hands in an agony of fear and anxiety, while Mabel stole in at intervals from her watch beside Fitz to ask whether there was any news yet. Over and over again the anxious watchers persuaded themselves that they could hear the sound of firing echoed across the miles of desert which separated them from Dera Gul, and on each occasion they assured one another that the idea was absurd. Mrs. Hardy came in several times to scold them for sitting up, twice spoiling the effect of her rebukes by administering hot coffee as a corrective, but she knew as well as they did that they could not bring themselves to face the solitude of their own rooms. At last, just as day was breaking, a messenger came from the signal officer at the camp to say that signals of some sort were visible to the eastward, but the mists of the morning made it impossible to read them properly. There was still an hour or so more of weary waiting, and then Dick and Haycraft rode in together, the latter with his arm in a sling. He had been knocked from one of the scaling-ladders by a stone hurled at him, and the bone was broken, but otherwise he was only bruised. And what did even a broken arm signify, when there was victory at last?

"It was just as we thought," Dick told Georgia. "As soon as we were inside the cave, I saw the door begin to come down—shutting out the stars, don't you know? and a voice called out to us to surrender. But just when the door ought to have descended with a crash, it made a grating noise instead, and stuck fast, for the stones were piled about four feet high on each side. The enemy saw the dodge in a moment, and opened fire through the holes up above, but as we were all in the dark, it was a pretty wild affair. Two or three were wounded, and from the back of the cave came an awful scream—a woman's scream. It was that wretched Jehanara, who had tried to escape up the staircase, and was shot down by mistake. So now we shall never know—or rather, the General won't—whether she was deceived herself, or deceiving us. Then, as we got out of the place, we heard the sound of the attack on the other side, and we raced round to take part in it. Our men were already in at the breach the shells have made, and by the time we got up they were fighting hand to hand inside. We pressed the garrison back from point to point, until we came to the zenana. It seems that Bahram Khan had talked big about killing all his women before the end came, but his plucky old mother didn't quite see it. She and the rest barricaded themselves in, all except Bahram Khan's wife Zeynab, and kept him out. The fellow made a great fuss about breaking down the barricade, and went off to find a hammer or pickaxe or something to do it with, but we got there first. The men he had left fought to the last in front of the barricade, and behind it the old Begum held out stoutly until I came up, when she surrendered at discretion. Then we found out from one of our wounded that Bahram Khan and his wife had got away through the cave, with either two or three of his men, so that he is still at large, though the place is in our hands. Of

course the regiment is scouring the country for him, and the tribes are all thirsting for the reward that has been offered, but it is a horrid bother."

"Zeynab will scarcely be the help to him that Jehanara would have been," said Georgia.

"No, but I don't like his being loose. I shall get them to post a sentry at the gate here, as well as the Sikh at Burgrave's door, and none of you must go outside without an escort. Mab mustn't try any more of her adventurous rides."

"Why, Dick, there's no one for her to ride with at present."

"So there isn't, happily. Well, I shall be thankful if her devotion to Anstruther lasts long enough to keep her between walls just now. Bahram Khan driven desperate would be an ugly customer to meet in the open desert."

It was a source of considerable relief to Dick when he learned that at this particular time Mabel was less likely than ever to quit her charge. Two or three days before, she had astonished Dr. Tighe by demanding to be allowed to assist in dressing the patient's burns. The doctor, who had contrived, with what he regarded as almost superhuman cunning, always to accomplish this process at a time when she was not on duty, was much perplexed by the request.

"Trust me," he urged; "I'll let you help as soon as it's desirable."

Mabel shook her head. "You don't understand," she said. "I want to know the worst while he is still unconscious. I think I can trust myself not to make any sign, but I am not sure, and if it is very dreadful—oh, it would break my heart if he thought I shrank from him because of his scars!"

"But, my dear young lady, that's all the more reason for waiting. The wounds will be far less painful to look at when they are a little more healed."

"That's just it. If I see them now, at their worst, I can't be horrified afterwards. I want to be able to judge of the improvement, so that I may cheer him if he thinks he is not getting on."

Dr. Tighe muttered fiercely to himself, but yielded at last, and gave Mabel permission to act as his assistant at the next dressing. She thought she had schooled herself to bear the worst, but in spite of all her resolutions she shrank and shivered involuntarily when she realised the frightful change in the dark handsome face she had always secretly admired. Dr. Tighe, going about his work with swift practised fingers, said nothing, and pretended not to notice the drops of water which splashed upon him from the basin she held.

"Will he—can he ever look at all as he did?" she asked in a whisper at last.

"If things turn out as I hope, he will look no worse than a man who is badly marked with smallpox. There will be two or three ugly seams—here, and here"—he indicated the precise spots lightly with a

finger-tip—"but the hair will help to cover them when it grows again, and if the mouth is much disfigured—why, you must lay your commands upon the patient to grow a beard."

Mabel was crying. "Oh, it is too dreadful, too dreadful!" she sobbed.

"Then you had better leave the sick-room to me before he recovers consciousness. There's no need to make things worse for him by raising false hopes. Either stick to him, disfigurements and all, or don't let him know that he ever had the chance of marrying you."

"It's not for myself; it's for him!" flashed forth Mabel. "Stick to him? of course I shall. He himself is not changed. But I can't be too thankful that I have seen him like this. At least I know the worst."

Again the doctor was puzzled. Was she forcing herself to keep faith, for shame or pity's sake, or was she really in love still? He did not attempt to argue the matter with her, and nothing more was said on the subject for a day or two. Then the doctor stopped Mabel one morning at the door of the sick-room.

"One moment, Miss North. Has the patient ever exhibited any signs of consciousness in your presence—tried to speak, or anything of the sort?"

"Never," said Mabel in surprise. "I should have told you if he had."

"I didn't know whether you might be luxuriating in the sentimental satisfaction of feeling that you were the only person he recognised. You needn't be angry; from your point of view it would be very natural. Well, I can't make it out, then."

"But has he spoken again—are there any signs——?"

"Not a word. But I can't help thinking that there may be a kind of semi-consciousness about him—ability to distinguish light from darkness, or to hear a loud noise in the midst of silence, perhaps—and I am almost certain that he knows when you are there. There are minute variations of temperature and pulse which correspond day after day, marking the difference between your presence and absence. It's a queer thing."

"And you think he will soon be quite conscious? Oh, doctor!" and this hope it was that kept Mabel so closely within the walls of the Sarai as to satisfy even Dick. But no further change in the patient's condition seemed to reward her eager watchfulness. Dr. Tighe said nothing more, and Mabel was afraid to ask questions. Any good news he would surely tell her, and she did not want to hear any that was bad. After another three days, however, he stopped her again outside the sick-room.

"Miss North, I'm going to give that poor fellow away. I won't presume to inquire into your feelings towards him, but unless you can take him, scarred as he will be, without a qualm, you had better keep away from him in future. He is conscious, but he guesses how it is

with him, and he means to tire you out. He has settled in his own mind that if he shows no gratitude for your nursing, and no interest in your presence, you will leave him alone, so that he won't be tempted to take advantage of your pity for him. So he lies there like a log, and the self-repression is bad for him. I would be glad to see you end it one way or another."

"Do you mean that he can speak, and see, and hear, but pretends he can't?" demanded Mabel.

"No, no. He can't see—because of the bandage over his eyes, if for no other reason—and he can't speak intelligibly. But he can hear, and he can answer questions by moving his right hand for yes, and his left for no. That's how I found it all out."

"And he has pretended not to be able to hear a sound! Why, I might have said anything to him—anything! Happily I haven't," catching the doctor's eye, "for Colonel Slaney told me so particularly not to excite him. But what do you want me to do?"

"To please yourself. Either make him understand that you mean to stick to him, or simply stay away. It'll be better for him."

"Which have you told him you expect I shall do?" asked Mabel, turning upon him. The doctor looked guilty.

"I'd have had the greatest pleasure in preparing the poor fellow's mind, if I'd known," he confessed, "but for the life of me I couldn't decide which you'd be likely to do."

"Thanks for your high opinion of me," said Mabel, with a short laugh, entering the room. "Perhaps you will kindly notice that I am putting an end to your doubts at this moment."

Such was the confused condition of Dr. Tighe's mind that he did not at first realise the bearing of this sentence. Indeed, it was not until he was busy in his improvised surgery half-an-hour later that he perceived its full import, and made the bottles ring again with the shout of joy which greeted his discovery. As for Mabel, she sat down in her usual place beside the bed, and bent over the patient.

"Fitz," she said very distinctly, "I want to speak to you. You needn't pretend you can't hear, for I know Dr. Tighe has been talking to you. Raise your right hand when you mean yes, and your left when you mean no."

No movement of any kind followed, but Mabel was not to be daunted.

"I understand," she went on, "that you don't like me to be here, and would rather I left off helping to nurse you?"

This time the right hand was unmistakably raised an inch or so.

"I have no right to offer any objection," resumed Mabel, "but I don't think you need have left Dr. Tighe to tell me about it. I suppose I ought to have known that I had treated you too badly for you ever to care for me again."

The left hand was shaken two or three times with pathetic vehemence.

"Then some one has told you," indignantly, "how old and wretched

I am beginning to look. Even Flora confesses it—I made her tell me—but she said she loved me just the same. I said I shouldn't mind it, if it didn't prevent my friends caring for me—and there were one or two to whom I felt sure it would make no difference. I never thought that you——No, you are not to touch that bandage," intercepting a feeble movement of one hand towards the eyes. "Do you want to be blind? But it's better as it is," with a heavy sigh—"better that we should part now. I mean, I couldn't bear you to think me ugly."

Again the left hand was shaken vehemently.

"Do you mean that it isn't that? Then there's only one other thing it can possibly be. You don't believe I can be faithful, though you can; and you haven't realised that it's just this accident of yours which removes my objection to you. You know I said you would look so dreadfully young compared with me. Well, no one can say that now. You will look like a battered veteran, and though I have gone off so dreadfully, I shall look quite youthful beside you. Do you understand?"

The right hand was lifted somewhat doubtfully.

"I'm glad of that. Because, you see, I have told people that we are engaged, and it would be such a very uncomfortable thing if I had to contradict it. Now listen. Flora and I have agreed that I am not Queen Mab any longer, but if you agree it will be very rude." Up came the left hand with alacrity. "That's right; then I am still Queen Mab to you, and I lay my commands on you that this sort of thing is not to happen again. I mean to help nurse you, whether you like it or not, and you will get well much sooner if you make up your mind to like it. But even if you don't, I won't give you up."

Both hands were raised, with an imploring gesture, and Mabel took them in her own, and hid her face in them.

"Because I love you, Fitz. You couldn't have the heart to send me away after that, could you? Don't try to talk; I understand."

Returning to her watch that evening, Mabel met the Commissioner, who stopped to inquire after Fitz.

"He is conscious; he knows me," she answered joyfully, adding, after a moment's hesitation, "I think perhaps you will like to know that it is all right between us now."

"I am very glad to hear it. I hope from my heart that you may be absolutely happy. As for Anstruther," added Mr. Burgrave in his old courtly way, "there can be no question as to his happiness."

"We shall always feel that we owe it very much to you," faltered Mabel.

"It is extremely kind of you to say so. I am leaving early tomorrow, and that is a pleasant assurance to carry with me. I hoped I should meet you this evening, as I am dining at your brother's, but I see you have other duties."

"I am so sorry—I didn't understand—how stupid of me!" cried Mabel. "Are you leaving the frontier altogether?"

"I am returning in the first instance to Bab-us-Sahel, to take up my regular duties again. My visit to the frontier has extended over a preposterous length of time, owing first to my accident and then to the rising, and I fear it has thrown the machinery of government a good deal out of gear. Personally, however, I cannot bring myself to regret it. I have enjoyed many important experiences, for which I did not bargain when I set out."

Mabel's eyes fell before the kindly look in his. "Can you ever forgive me?" she murmured.

"I have nothing to forgive. The fault was mine." He bowed over the hand she held out to him. "The Queen can do no wrong."

They parted, and Mr. Burgrave went on to the Norths' quarters, two small square rooms without a door, and possessing only one small window high up in the back wall. One side was open to the courtyard of the Sarai, and at night was somewhat inadequately closed by means of curtains and Venetian blinds. The dinner-table had been laid with the help of contributions from the Grahams and the Hardys, and the Commissioner pretended politely not to recognise his own reading-lamp, the only large lamp belonging to the community that had escaped the chances of war and earthquake. Flora, whose father was dining with the General, occupied Mabel's vacant place, and did her part in helping to arrange the impromptu drawing-room at the back of the room. There were screens and a brazier, to mitigate the coldness of the evening air, and for furniture the camp-chairs which had played so many parts in the economy of the siege. Dick had received strict injunctions to offer his guest a cigar, and Georgia and Flora were prepared to efface themselves so far as to retire into the bed-room should Mr. Burgrave's principles forbid him to smoke in the presence of ladies, but their self-sacrifice was not needed. No sooner were the chairs arranged than the Commissioner, who had been helping to carry them behind the screen, prepared to take his leave.

"I will ask you to excuse me early," he said to Georgia, "for I have a good deal of writing to do, and Mr. Beltring has been good enough to offer to take poor Beardmore's place for this evening."

He hesitated for a moment, turned to go, and then came back again.

"I think perhaps I had better explain something that might perplex you in the future," he said, speaking to Dick, but including Georgia. "It has to do with the frontier question."

"I thought we had come to an agreement on that subject," said Dick, with some apprehension.

"Pardon me, I agreed to withdraw my report in deference to your representations, but I still think your principles unsound—radically unsound."

The rest gazed at him in alarm, and he went on. "Your custom of intervening in trans-frontier disputes, and practically exercising authority outside our own borders, is diametrically opposed to the traditional policy of the Government. I am bound to admit that it seems to succeed in your case, but it needs exceptional men to carry it out. You, Major, especially with Mrs. North to assist you"—he bowed to Georgia—"are unquestionably a power to be reckoned with all along this frontier, but what would befall the ordinary civil servant who might be sent to succeed you?"

"That's just it," said Dick. "You mustn't send us the common or garden office-wallah up here. Let me pick the right man—whether he's a wild rattlepate like Anstruther, or a steady plodding chap like Beltring—and give him the right rough-and-tumble sort of training, till he knows the tribes like a brother, and there's your exceptional man ready when you want him. Only he must be the right sort to begin with, and he must be caught young."

"A possible clue to my own lack of success up here!" mused the Commissioner. "Still, I fear you will scarcely find that any Government will look with favour upon a system that would practically make the frontier a close preserve for you and your pupils. But this is what I wished to say. I can't conscientiously work with you on your lines, though I have promised not to oppose you, and therefore I am recommending the severance of the frontier districts from those of Khemistan proper, and their erection into a separate agency under an officer answerable directly to the Viceroy. Don't think I have tried to shift the responsibility from my own shoulders. It seemed that while we could not well work together, we might work side by side. I have done the best I can."

He went out precipitately, one of the servants hastening to light him to his own quarters, thus restoring the lamp. Those left behind looked at each other.

"Poor old chap!" said Dick. "It's about the worst thing he could have done for himself, and it's not very much good to us. The Great Great One can scarcely be expected to welcome such a slap in the face as that. His own nominee, sent to carry out his very own policy, recommending its reversal, not because his views have changed, but simply because facts are against him!"

They sat talking round the brazier in the dusk for some time, until there was a footstep outside, and Beltring pushed aside the screen and entered. He had a paper in his hand.

"Why, you are all in the dark, Mrs. North!" he said. "Never mind, I can tell you the great news. The Commissioner has just had a telegram that the rumour of the Viceroy's resignation is true. Lord Torvalvin is coming out instead."

"Torvalvin!" cried Dick. "Then the frontier's safe."

"And you will be warden of the marches still," said Flora.

"That seems to make me out a sort of Vicar of Bray," grumbled Dick.

"It's only Flora's poetical way of speaking," said Georgia. "I'm sure it sounds much better to talk of keeping the marches than of running the frontier."

"Yes," said Flora. "I was thinking of the inscription in Sir Walter Scott's hall at Abbotsford, about the 'men wha keepit the marchys in the old tyme for the Kynge. Trewe men war they in their tyme, and in their defence God them defendyt.'"

"I like that," said Georgia softly.

"Well," said Dick, "it's all very well for me, but Torvalvin's coming out will be a fearful blow for Burgrave. I suppose he will feel bound to resign, for I certainly don't see how they can work together. Did he seem much cut up, Beltring?"

"He didn't show it, sir. Only said he thought you would like to see the telegram. Why, his lamp has gone out!" Beltring had reached the threshold on his way back. "Good Heavens! what's that?"

A wild uproar was arising from the camp, which stretched into the desert beyond the Sarai, and alternate cries of "Din! Din!" and "Ghazis!" were discernible.

"A Ghazi raid!" cried Dick, springing for his sword. "Georgie, take the boy and Rahah, and barricade yourself in with Mab and Miss Graham. You have two revolvers, and I'll send help as soon as possible. Take the chairs. They'll help you to build up a corner."

Rahah ran out with the baby, and Dick and Beltring saw the ladies safely to the door of the sick-room, then rushed to the gateway, where they stumbled over the dead body of the sentry. The tumult in the camp still continued, shouts and yells coming from several directions mingled with the sound of shots, but in each case all was quiet again before they arrived at the point of interest. Such of the troops as were new to the frontier looked somewhat ashamed when they realised that the attack which had thrown the camp into confusion was the work of only four men, but the more experienced knew that four desperate fanatics, armed to the teeth, and determined to kill until they themselves were killed, were by no means foes to be despised. The one who had fought most obstinately wore a green turban, and Dick nodded grimly as he caught sight of his face.

"Bahram Khan! I thought so," he said. "But I'm afraid there's been the devil's own work done in the Sarai. Bring torches."

A number of officers ran back with him to the gateway, where the sentry was found to have been dexterously strangled from behind. Entering the courtyard, they turned towards the Commissioner's quarters, which were still in darkness. Suddenly Dick's foot slipped.

"Another body here!" he said, and some one brought forward a torch. To their astonishment, it was a woman who lay before them, dressed in rich native garments, which, with the coarse *chadar* covering her face, were soaked with blood. She had been stabbed in the breast,

but was still breathing heavily. Sending a messenger for Dr. Tighe, they went on, in growing dread as to what they might find. Their fears were justified. On the verandah lay the Sikh sentry, stabbed in the back, and on the office floor was the body of the Commissioner, hacked and disfigured almost beyond recognition with a hundred wounds. It did not need the verdict of Dr. Tighe to assure the men who stood round that life was extinct.

"What can have been the reason? Why the Commissioner and not North?" were the questions that passed from mouth to mouth, as Dick tore down a curtain and laid it carefully over the body, with the help of Dr. Tighe.

"Perhaps the woman can tell us something. She seems conscious now," said some one, but when the doctor knelt down beside her she pulled her veil feebly over her face, moaning out a name the while.

"She won't let me touch her. She's a *pardah nishin*," he said, rising. "It's the doctor lady she's asking for, Major."

Dick went himself to fetch his wife, and the men stood aside a little as Georgia tried to stanch the gaping wound, which was draining the poor creature's life away. The woman herself laughed weakly.

"It matters not, O doctor lady. I shall follow my lord."

"You are little Zeynab?" asked Georgia gently, looking into the drawn face.

"I am that luckless one, O doctor lady, and I die thus for the sake of the kindness thou didst show me many years ago."

"Don't talk now," said Georgia. "Tell me afterwards."

"Nay, I must speak now, for soon it will be too late. Six days we have been hiding here and there, O doctor lady, my lord and his three servants and I, and this evening we were in the shadow of the oleanders beside the gate. Thence we saw the Kumpsoner Sahib return to his house with a light carried before him, and presently there came out a young sahib with a *chit* in his hand, and crossed the courtyard. Then my lord said, 'It is time,' and two of his followers slew the guard at the gate, while he and the third flung themselves like tigers upon the accursed Sikh on the verandah, and killed him without a cry. I, who had crept after them, saw the Kumpsoner Sahib sitting at a table with the light in front of him, and a pistol at his right hand—for truly he feared my lord, even in his own house—and I saw also that my lord had crept in like a cat, and was stretching out his hand over his shoulder for the pistol. But as he took away the pistol, the Kumpsoner Sahib saw his hand, and turned round and sprang up. Then one of the other men blew at the lamp to put it out, and the light burned low. And my lord laughed and said, 'We meet at last, O Barkaraf Sahib. Thou didst indeed believe that victory was thine, but if Nāth Sahib's sister is not for me, neither is she for thee. Death is thy bride.' At first it seemed to me that the Kumpsoner Sahib was about to speak, but he stood up straight with his arms folded, and said nothing, until my lord added divers

other taunts, when he said, 'Take not the name of that lady upon thy lips, O low-born one. Dost thou fear to strike me, who am here unarmed, that thou speakest evil of a woman who is absent?' Then my lord struck him with his dagger, and the lamp went out, and they all fell upon him, and stabbed him many times. And coming out, my lord found me, and said. 'Go through the midst of the Sarai, and cry out aloud for the doctor lady, that she may come out and we may slay her and her son, and it may be the accursed Nāth Sahib himself also.' But I would not, O doctor lady, and therefore it was that my lord stabbed me, and that I die now at his hand." Her voice failed suddenly, and her head fell back on Georgia's arm.

They buried the Commissioner in the little cemetery at Alibad, and for days people went about saying it was the irony of fate that his grave should be next to that of General Keeling. It was Georgia who chose the spot, however, and she thought otherwise.

"He would have been a man after my father's own heart, if he had known him," she said, "though I don't say they wouldn't have wrangled on theoretical questions from morning to night. But when I think that with death staring him in the face, he would not say a word that might turn their thoughts to Fitz, who was only a few feet away, and absolutely defenceless, I feel that he was one of the bravest men I have ever known."

Not all the opinions expressed concerning Mr. Burgrave were so favourable, however. On the evening of his funeral two Pathan soldiers from one of the relieving regiments met Ismail Bakhsh near the cemetery, and saluted him with marked friendliness.

"O brother," they said, "we have heard that the famous general, Sinjā Kīlin Sahib Bahadar, is wont to ride abroad upon this border by night. Is this so?"

"It is true," returned the old trooper, "and I myself have heard him, not once nor twice. And moreover, what these eyes of mine have beheld, it is not wise to relate."

"Pray, brother, tell us when these things may be seen and heard? We have a great desire to view them for ourselves."

"Nay," said Ismail Bakhsh, with a lofty smile, "for that ye must wait awhile. It is only when there is to be trouble on the border that the General Sahib rides, and"—with a wave of the hand towards the new-made grave—"the troubler of the border lies there."

THE END

LETTERS FROM THE NORTH

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "IN THE VALLEY OF THE RHONE," "LETTERS FROM
MAJORCA," ETC., ETC.

CARE AMICE,—Our gallant little steamer made its way through the night, ploughing the dark waters under the mysterious starlight. There were dim outlines of islands and rocks, through which the vessel steered cunningly. All the details of the scenery were not visible, for there was no moon to throw its silvery beams upon the grey moss-grown rocks that abound, the graceful waterfalls here and there to be found in the daylight; seen and loved many a time under the broad sunshine.

We passed the Skateström with its rapid tide, caused by the narrow waters of Bremanger and the Kugsundö, a passage the navigators of small steamers prefer to make between sunrise and sundown. We steered through the Ulvesand and passed the islands of Barmö and Seljeö: the latter, apart from its wild beauty, famous as possessing the ruins of a Benedictine monastery and the shrine of St. Sunnica of Ireland, Bergen's patron saint. Here in days gone by, before steam was known or thought of, in the sheltered bay of Sildegabet, vessels would lie up many weeks at a time, waiting a fair wind for rounding the stormy peninsula of Stadland.

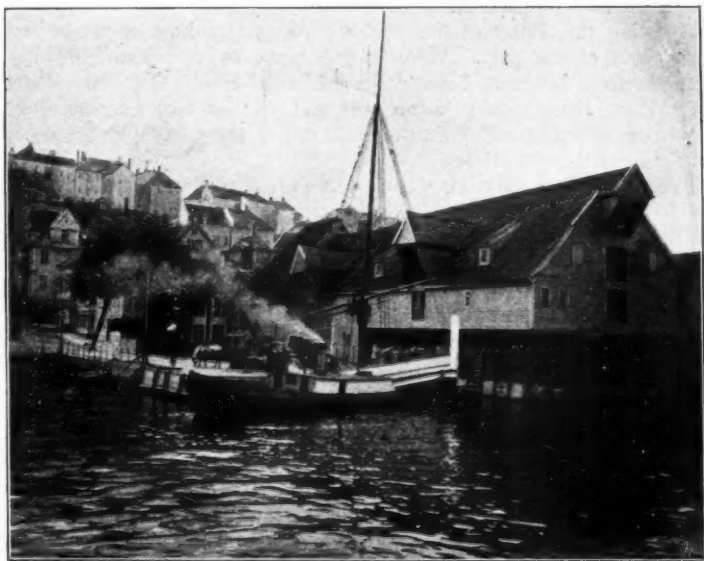
In great darkness and the hours of early morning we passed the great Hornelen, some 3000 feet of towering perpendicular rock lying between the mainland and the open sea; where the coasting steamers never fail to raise an echo, so prolonged and multiplied that it seems as though spirits of the air or ocean—Undine and all her train perhaps—had there taken up a temporary abode, and from every nook and crevice speeded the passing vessel. In this Egyptian gloom Hornelen looked a monstrous world looming down upon us, all its height and massiveness, all its outlines, exaggerated tenfold under the stars.

We left it behind us and passed through the narrow strait of the Frøifjord, between the mainland and Bremanger; after which the voyage becomes plainer sailing, and we lose much of the beauty of the scenery. This, however, was not perceptible in the depths of the night.

Of late the steamers making for Bergen had been crowded. The Daneheims had secured a cabin, and on their boat not a single unreserved berth was to be found. The French Communists had slept on

chairs or tables in the saloon, and L. in rather malicious triumph had cried: "Vendetta! A Roland for an Oliver. *Une nuit blanche* for the Communists in return for the tortures inflicted on me!"

It was the last of the great rush. We were more fortunate in finding a vessel only half full, with any number of cabins at our disposal. So when, in spite of the beauty of the night, the charm of the waters, the mystery of darkness, the splendour of the starlit heavens—when in spite of all this, we at length turned in for a few hours' rest, it was to comparative ease and comfort.



BERGEN.

The steward in the largeness of his heart—and possibly of his expectations—had given to each of us a stately cabin.

"At length we are lodged like princes, and when we least expected it," laughed L. "Our good luck, as well as our infallibility, follows us to the end. I begin to think the spirit of St. Olaf may be hovering about us, directing, impelling, restraining; and that is why he did not put in an appearance at Einabu. He was otherwise occupied on our behalf."

Whether this were so or not, the remaining night hours passed in safety and refreshing sleep, whilst the good ship steamed and throbbed through the calm waters, avoiding all the shoals, quicksands and countless rocks that beset her path.

Once more on deck at sunrise, we found we had made good way towards Bergen. The waters had widened, and the scenery was again full of charm. The rock-bound coast of the Søndfjord lay on our left, mountains lofty and rugged stood clear-cut against the glorious morning sky. The sun was already gilding the heights as we steamed southward. In the distance the sea had caught his rays and was bathed in a splendour of light.

We passed between the islands of Ytre and Indre Sulen, steering amidst innumerable rocks; all was magnificent in colouring, brilliant in that sparkling, transparent atmosphere. A fresh, bracing wind, exhilarating as champagne, endowed one with boundless energy, suggesting the Elixir of life so long sought by the alchemists and magicians of the past. Here it had come to us without seeking, straight from heaven. Passing the "Norske Hest," that lofty island of Alden, rising nearly 2000 feet out of the sea, one observed countless sheep browsing on the green slopes, the small, pitiable sheep of these northern latitudes.

And so at last the coast rounded, the great and curious mountains of Bergen rose up, unmistakable in outline as the sun or the moon in the heavens, and the vessel pointed for the harbour. All the old familiar features stood out in the early sun and atmosphere. Bergenhus on the left, Nordnaes on its promontory, the succession of harbours, endless forests of masts, countless flags of all nations flying in the wind, the far-off town rising upon the slopes, and the ponderous mountains in the background.

A scene of wonderful animation, of ceaseless life and activity: vessels loading and unloading; quays lined with bales and boxes; men running to and fro; the air full of the sound of voices singing in unison. "Pull-y haul-y, pull-y haul-y! Ho! hi! hoy!" they sang, or words that took that form. The donkey-engine was heard on all sides; cranes drew up great bales, swung them round, and deposited them on the quays or in the holds of the vessels. All down the quays to the right were the gabled warehouses, a never-ending row broken here and there by short piers where steamers waited their hour, or from which they had just departed. Bergen is a universal rallying-point. It is the Liverpool of Norway; for if Christiania exceeds it in actual tonnage, Bergen has the advantage in steam. At the very end of the harbour was the fish-market, its boats laden with silvery cargoes; a small crowd on shore contending for bargains.

Our own steamer drew up to her appointed pier, and we were not sorry to touch *terra firma*, pleasant though the short voyage had been.

The first person to greet us was the black page from Holdt's Hotel, who could not have grinned and shown his teeth more effectually had he known us for a hundred years. His comical face, with its thick lips and piercing black eyes, was so full of broad fun and humour, that it was impossible to look at it without laughing. This

the little black fellow interpreted as delight at seeing him again, and his smile grew almost alarming in its wide unrestraint. He took possession of all our bag and baggage, was quite equal to the occasion, and we knew that everything would turn up safely.

So we walked through the quiet streets and made our way towards Holdt's Hotel.

"It is quite like coming home," said L. "Go where we will, do what we may, we seem bound to come back to our starting-point. A pity they haven't better hotels. I suppose we shall be in for Pandemonium again to-night; an infliction to which the French Communists with their loud voices and midnight laughter were as nothing. And there—yes, I declare!—*Parlez du diable!*—there are the very Communists themselves!"

And there sure enough they were, peering into the fishing-boats on the water, screaming inquisitive questions in French to the men, who could not even guess at what they said and handed them up baskets of shining, silvery herrings which were rejected with infinite disdain. Again they broke into peals of laughter as they passed on to the next boat, and went through the same ceremony.

They looked much as they had always shown themselves; yet on this occasion not only did the mother appear sat upon, but her bonnet had followed her example. It was a large black straw construction, something after the Salvation Army type, and somehow had become flattened and out of shape, as though it had lately been in the wars, or she had made use of it as a nightcap. The poor woman looked inexpressibly comical and woebegone, and L., in spite of his antipathy, went into silent convulsions. The son looked more dissipated than ever; and supporting the daughter, one on either side, were the two Englishmen who had been so attentive to her that memorable evening at Visnaes. Fortunately for L.'s peace of mind they were not staying at Holdt's Hotel, and we saw them only on this occasion. Probably they went off that morning by boat or train.

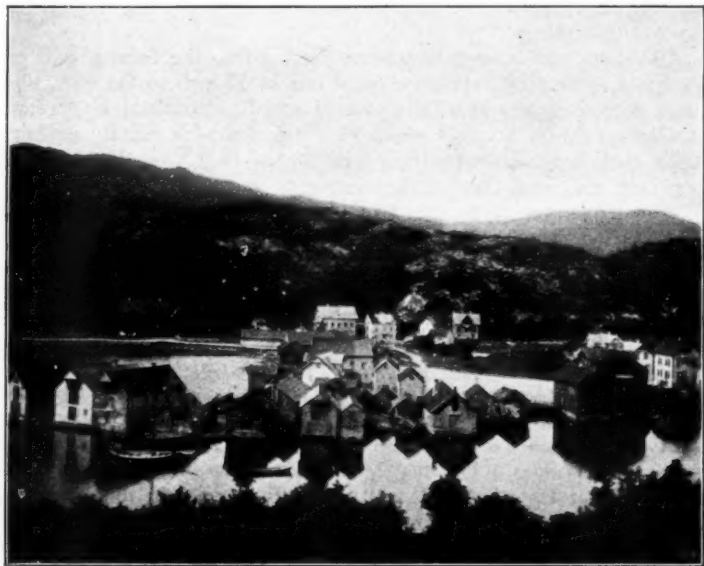
Every one seems to go to Bergen, but no one dreams of staying long in that interesting, picturesque, but very rainy city. It is nothing in itself, but only a means to an end. People flock to it from all parts of Norway as the summer draws to its close; the hotels are crowded, every berth on every steamer is taken, and late comers think themselves fortunate if they secure a bench in the saloon for their uneasy slumbers. Should the winds blow and the waves run high—

But no; I draw a veil over consequences. Description may go too far, and there is a time to keep silence.

We had turned down to the fish-market for a moment's inspection of the lively scene, never anticipating that our eyes would be gladdened with a sight of the French Communists, the son more than ever suggestive of endless cigarettes and *petits verres*.

Setting aside the noisy people crowding around the fishing-boats, it was really a remarkable sight in this early morning sunshine.

Countless vessels in the harbour stretched far as the eye could reach; small ferries darted to and fro in every direction, quick as arrows from a bow; the Hanseatic houses to our right looked boldly on the quays, as they have looked for many a long year. Half-way down the quay were King Haakon's Banqueting Hall and the Rosenkranz Tower, the latter employed to intimidate and keep in order the ambitious and quarrelsome Hanseatic merchants, who were growing too numerous, too grasping and dictatorial for the steady-going people of Bergen: and who were the tyrants and terror of the middle ages. The power had begun to assert itself—that com-



OS.

bative disposition—as far back as some five or six centuries ago, a momentous period of the world's history; but some portions of the tower bear traces of a period a century or two earlier.

It was a cruel age that earlier period, for about this time Magnus Sigurdsön was taken prisoner at Bergen, and had his eyes put out by Harold Gille—that favourite mode of torture in those barbarous times. Gille had hoped to succeed to his throne, but the next year, 1136, was himself put to death.

Twenty-eight years after, in 1164, Magnus Erlingsön was crowned in Bergen, memorable as the first coronation that Norway had ever

seen. The famous Archbishop Eystein performed the ceremony. A hundred years later King Haakon was enthroned here, followed in due course by his son Magnus. So Tibni dies and Omri reigns.

But the reigns were not very peaceful, and Bergen was especially the scene of many a conflict.

It was in 1665 that our own Earl of Sandwich—he who, to repudiate his countrymen's taunt of cowardice, afterwards remained alone on his burning vessel and went down with her—it was our own Earl of Sandwich who, with only fourteen warships, pursued a Dutch fleet of sixty East-Indiamen into the harbour of Bergen.



OS.

Here the Dutch found shelter and help; Bergenhus Castle, guarding the port, directed its primitive guns against them; but the English did not retire until they had fired many a parting shot, some of which may still be seen on the walls of the Rosenkranz Tower.

Bergen was then quite an ancient city; Christiania, not yet fifty years old, was in its infancy; Bergen had seen five mighty centuries pass by, herself ever growing in strength and wealth until the birth of Christiania began to tarnish her glory; very gradually and imperceptibly at first, but very surely.

It was King Olaf Kyrre who had founded Bergen in that far-off

eleventh century, and the city was then called Björgvin : "the Pasture amongst the Mountains," since corrupted to Bergen.

Doubtless it was a very different place in those days ; the mountains overlooking it were green and wild and wooded, green pastures ran down to the very rocks of the sea ; and the people, strong and primitive, were mighty for work.

Bergen soon began to be known, and English and German traders visited her port, but the former were first in the field. It was the residence of the Kings of Norway, and Haakon made the first treaty of commerce with England that England ever signed ; a transaction which might almost be called the foundation stone of England's trade with the world, of which in her own good time she was to become mistress.

When in 1217 Haakon died and his son Magnus reigned in his stead, the trade with England was already well established.

Then came the Germans, and by quiet working, by strong will and perseverance, line upon line, here a little and there a little, they won the trade from England. By the middle of the fifteenth century all the English trade had transferred itself to Germany. The characteristics of the English—and the Germans—were very much in those days what they are in these.

The Germans had formed a guild in the fourteenth century which was already developing into the great Hanseatic League.

By the dawn of the new century fleets of German pirates infested and plundered Bergen, until they became its masters and controlled all the northern part of the Norwegian coast. In 1455 the traders put to death the Governor appointed by the king, the Bishop, and many of the foremost people of the town ; they burnt down the church, and the monastery of Munkelid on Nordnaes Point, stretching out into the sea ; and Fort Frederiksborg and the Firewatch now stand where once the monks paced to and fro and fasted and prayed. On the north-west side are now the Observatory and the Hospital, condoning perhaps, by their high aims, the desecration of the days gone by.

For a century of time the Hanseatic League exercised its tyranny, and then the worm turned.

The Norwegian citizens shook off their bondage ; in 1556 the power of the League was broken ; and two centuries later the last German house in Bergen passed out of existence.

Bergen has since flourished in her quiet way, and never, at any period of her history, could she have presented a livelier, more vigorous scene than we looked upon that morning after our return from Aalesund.

"Lively and vigorous it is, indeed," said L., as he watched the French Communists file off in the direction of the *Poste Restante* : "full of life and charm the scene undoubtedly is, and we have nothing in England in the way of harbour half so picturesque as this. Never-

theless I begin to realise that fasting in the morning is not an unmixed blessing. It is very like drawing upon your capital, and at the present moment I feel very much as if all mine were in the Sinking Fund. It seems ages—it *is* ages—since our devoted steward brought us that saving cup of tea; let us now diligently make for the hotel."

Our way did not lead towards the *Poste Restante*, but through the great square, where stood Bennett's office, the Ultima Thule of resource to all who visit Bergen; and there our letters awaited us.

"No," said L. peremptorily, as I turned towards their office. "No, that cannot yet be. We must exercise a little more patience for our correspondence. It will wait; I cannot. Again I say that nature abhors a vacuum, and I have reached the end of my resources. And to crown all," laughing, "Bennett's office is not yet open."

So instead of crossing the square to the left, we turned to the right into the narrow street where Holdt's Hotel stands at the end, just as the street winds into the broad thoroughfare in which the nightly Pandemonium took place for the benefit of the Bergenese and the misery of quiet travellers.

We were expected, and our names were already on the blackboard; and on entering the gold-braided portier came up with one of his regal bows. "He had reserved his best rooms; if comfort was to be had in the hotel it should be ours."

A servant marshalled us to the said rooms, one of which was of enormous size; the very largest in the house.

"I shall feel lost here," laughed L., looking round the spacious apartment. "Presently it will be impossible to find myself, much less anything else. And to-night I shall dream that I am giving a ball—we might give a splendid ball here—that the room is blazing with wax-lights, and fairy forms are waltzing and whirling to the music of that monarch of bands, the R. A."

"Whilst you are leading off with Helena Kantlow," I suggested. "Countess Daneheim would tell you that coming events cast their shadows before. Perhaps to-night your visions will come to you. How charming our friends were, and how much we miss them!"

When breakfast was a thing of the past, and L. had faithfully ministered to the abhorred vacuum, then and only then were we allowed to think of our correspondence.

Our time in Norway was drawing to an end, and we had consulted together as to the way of returning to England. That very evening the old *El Dorado* was to sail for Hull. Should we sail with it? As usual L. took the law into his own hands, and metaphorically placed an extinguisher upon me. I had to tamely give in to his opinions, and keep my own carefully in the background.

"We have no need to return to-night," he declared, "and nothing shall persuade me to go back in that old tub if by any possibility I can take passage in any other."

"Yet I doubt if we can do better. After, all she has been traversing to and fro for something under a century and hasn't yet gone to the bottom. That is worth taking into consideration."

"Not at all. On the doctrine of chances she ought to go to the bottom her very next crossing. The pitcher that went so often to the fountain was broken at last. I think we have Solomon's authority for that," he added, getting rather mixed in his sacred history.

"Then what do you propose doing?"

"I propose returning on Monday night by the Newcastle boat, and will ask for a show of hands for or against," looking into space. "Very good. Carried unanimously. Not another word to be said."

But a worm will turn. The Bergen worm, we have seen, turned against the Hanseatic League. "The Newcastle boat!" I protested. "Think of the awful passengers. I am told they are nothing but coal-heavers, Polytechnics, and such-like kittle cattle."

"You have been utterly misinformed," said L., with gentle laughter. "The Polytechnics charter their own steamers, coming over in gangs of six hundreds—not to be confounded with Tennyson's 'Charge of the Six Hundred,'" he laughed, "though they make much greater stir in the world, and create far more confusion. The Newcastle passengers are every whit as good as the Hull people; there is not a pin to choose between the two. And, really, one can only pray to be delivered from the greater part of them; that goes without saying in these days of promiscuous travelling."

"But you have never travelled by way of Newcastle. Who posted you up so well in this particular crossing?"

"I have scores of friends from the North Countree who have crossed that way, though I have not. They one and all tell me that the journey is most comfortable. Almost every passenger is fearfully sea-sick from the time they leave Bergen to the time they arrive at Newcastle. They keep to their cabins, are never seen at meals, and the few who are well—my friends in question—have all the vessel to themselves, and a very jolly time of it into the bargain."

"And is this untoward state of things due to the unseaworthiness of the vessels? Do they lurch, and shiver, and groan, and pitch, and roll, and turn head over heels?"

L. coughed. "My friends have always had very rough passages, that is all I can tell you—and it is quite sufficient," a suspicion of humour in his tones and a smile lurking about his mouth. "The boats are trumps, and the officers lay themselves out to be civil and attentive to the passengers; don't treat them as if they were bears to be muzzled and kept at a distance. It all counts."

There was nothing more to be said; L. had made up his mind. I might just as well try to turn back the tide with a broom as move L.'s fixed intentions.

So we left the breakfast table—a mere fragment of the feast that had been—and proceeded to Bennett's office. There we found our precious correspondence; precious at all times, but doubly precious in a distant land.

But first we had to interview Mr. Bennett, and record our experiences. The places to be recommended, and those that perhaps could be slightly improved. Such, for instance, as the melancholy station of Egge, which might have been substituted for the charming and absolutely perfect Red. We had to tell him of the people who were worthy of praise and those who deserved blame: and fortunately the latter



SOLSTRAND.

were in a great minority. And lastly, we had to assure him of the inestimable help of his travel-sketch; the route he had marked out and planned; how we should often have been stranded without it, had found it exact and unfailing almost in every particular. To all which Mr. Bennett modestly replied that he was glad to have been of any use to us.

"And now," said L., before I could put in a word edgeways about the crossing to England, "that old tub of an *El Dorado*—you admit she is a ramshackle old tub?"

But Mr. Bennett only smiled and shook his head. He was wise in his generation, and would not be committed to an opinion.

"She has made a great many voyages, and brought us a vast number of passengers. We must be grateful to her, and not hard on an old friend," was all he would say.

"Come, that is something of a concession," returned L. triumphantly. "You admit that she is OLD—and I would add UGLY, although I believe a ship is feminine. Well, sir, this old friend crosses to-night. She is no doubt very full—not a berth to be had?"

"Crammed," smiled Mr. Bennett. "There is not even half a berth left, much less a whole one. Every bench in the saloon will be occupied; some no doubt will sleep on the tables, and some will pace the decks. It is nearly the last boat of the season, and the most crowded. This particular boat always is so."

L. looked jubilant. All this bore out his opinions and chimed in with his wishes. It also added to his infallibility, and in some way touched upon his second-sight.

"And on Monday there is the Newcastle boat," he continued; "what hope of a cabin in that?"

"An excellent boat, and very comfortable," replied Mr. Bennett. "It so happens that I can offer you the very best cabin on board, which chances to be vacant through a misunderstanding, but will not be vacant long—though the boat will not be at all crowded. Every one seems flocking away to England to-night."

"That decides everything," said L., drawing a long breath. "It is a relief to get things settled and off one's mind. You will please reserve us that excellent cabin. But now to-day is Friday, and we don't sail till Monday evening. How can we best employ our two spare days?"

"There is no doubt as to what has to be done. You must go to Os to-morrow, and spend Sunday there. You will be delighted."

"Os?" returned L., much doubt in his tones. "Os? What an extraordinary name! It is enough to send one miles the other way."

"The most charming place you can imagine, sir," said Mr. Bennett, so decisively that his tone carried conviction with it. "And if on your return you do not tell me it is one of the loveliest spots you were ever in, I shall be infinitely surprised and disappointed."

"You have already advised us so well that it would be base ingratitude to doubt your judgment. Therefore, in spite of its almost repulsive name—though the long *o* somewhat condones the word—to Os we will go. We start to-morrow, you say. When do we return?"

"I should advise Sunday evening. There is an early train on Monday morning, but you will probably like a last clear day in Bergen, and it will be less tiring."

So this matter, like Monday's cabin, having been satisfactorily arranged, we left Mr. Bennett with renewed acknowledgments for his

help and politeness; and after that, for a time the world was effaced by our English letters.

It was about twelve o'clock, and we were walking through the Park that has been so picturesquely laid out, when L. suddenly came to a pause and uttered a gentle exclamation of surprise.

"What is it, L.? A mare's nest, or the Philosopher's Stone?"

"Neither one nor the other, since the age of miracles is past. It is not even those nineteenth-century Eastern slippers, the French Communists. But look—our lady of Skje! Please remember to pronounce it *She*, or the euphony will be lost."

He indicated a bench some thirty yards from us, where sat a lady in pensive attitude or deep consideration.

It was indeed the lady we had met at Skje, who had told us so much of her past history: her sad widowhood, which nevertheless was a gilded sorrow, and her wise determination never again to enter into the bonds of matrimony. As he pointed with his divining wand—so often did he seem to conjure with it that it deserved its name—the lady of Skje raised her head, at once recognised L.'s six feet two, and came towards us, all energy and welcome, her pensive mood thrown to the winds.

"This is very pleasant," she said, her voice full of hospitable tones. "I was quite prepared to know you, for at that moment, strangely enough, I was thinking of you both. And yet not strange, since these coincidences are amongst the most frequent events of life. I am convinced there is a psychological force dominating the world which we do not understand and only faintly conceive. And you, sir," turning to L., "with your infallibility and second-sight—which I have often dwelt upon since we parted at Skje—you must be specially capable of influencing the minds of others, consciously or unconsciously, whether you are thinking of them, or have not given them a thought for many days."

"In point of fact I have thought of you several times this morning," replied L. "It is only natural to associate you with our return to Bergen. But my mind invariably pictured you at Skje; it never occurred to me that you could be here now."

"Nevertheless, there is the proof of the subtle atmosphere," laughed the lady of Skje. "Infallibility was correct, second-sight in abeyance. I left my house half-an-hour ago, my thoughts strangely occupied with you. Not the least intention had I of coming into the Park, or of sitting down upon that bench. Yet unconsciously I did both; and you cannot persuade my common sense, or any other sense I possess, that this is the result of mere coincidence and accident."

"Has it ever happened to you before?" asked L., always ready to dip into psychological matters.

"Many a time. It was in this way that I met my husband; and if I told you the whole story you would say it was as direct a proof of psychological influence and atmosphere as could possibly exist."

"But, madame," said L., passing from psychology to realities, "how comes it that we have the good fortune to meet you here to-day, when we still imagined you at Skje?"

"You may well ask. I am almost as surprised to find myself here as you are to see me. The truth is I was suddenly called back to Bergen on a domestic mission. Nothing less than the engagement of a favourite niece of my late husband's to a man altogether unworthy of her. Now as my husband left me a free steward of his property, so I consider that he in a sense constituted me guardian to his nieces, and I will rise to the occasion. That ineligible man is incapable of true affection; his past life condemns him; and I am going to tell him that if he marries my niece not a kroner of my money will he ever touch. That will settle the matter and bring the maiden to her senses. She is really a charming creature; much too good to be thrown away on a man who would break her heart in six months. Why are these wretches so often fascinating and irresistible—to the young and inexperienced? Ah! my good husband was far-seeing. He did a wise thing to leave his property entirely at my disposal."

"He also paid the highest compliment in his power to your good sense and devotion to his memory," remarked L.

"To tell you the truth, it is as much the weight of my charge as my love of freedom, which has prevented me from changing my condition," returned our lady of Skje. "I am rather overwhelmed with the thought of my responsibilities. Please God, it shall never be said that I proved an unjust steward. For I hold it as morally culpable to misuse a trust as to write down eighty measures of wheat instead of a hundred. But now, sirs, I remember inviting you to dine with me if we should ever meet in Bergen; and I have an impression that you half promised to gratify me. To-day I am, unfortunately, engaged; but if you are not leaving by to-night's boat, will you dine with me to-morrow?"

"It is most kind of you to renew your invitation, but I fear we cannot accept it. We leave by Monday evening's boat, and to-morrow we go to Os. Mr. Bennett informs us that Os is a place to be seen, and we cannot do better than spend our spare days there."

"Mr. Bennett is quite right; his advice may always be trusted. I only regret that in this instance it deprives me of the pleasure of entertaining you to-morrow. Dinner, however, is a movable feast. You will probably return on Sunday night, and will dine with me on Monday at two o'clock. You know we are early people in Norway, and cling to the primitive manners of our forefathers. Christiania does not, like Paris, give the fashions to the world. Our unceremonious dinner shall be an *Abschied*, as the Germans say. Just we three; or if I can bring my foolish niece to her senses, she shall make a fourth."

So it was arranged. We accompanied our lady of Skje to her own

door at her request ; " that you may have no trouble in finding me on Monday," she had observed. It was not fifty yards from the gates of the Park ; one of a series of handsome houses, her own perhaps the most imposing of all.

" A large house for a solitary widow," she sighed ; " but I am fond of life and company, and am seldom alone."

We parted with friendly handshakes, and left our hostess brimming over with kindness and goodwill.

The day had been spent in exploring the immediate neighbourhood of Bergen, which is full of charm and variety. We had crossed to the



OUR HOTEL AT SOLSTRAND.

inner harbour, where vessels entered for repair and others were in process of construction, whilst beyond the quays, sawmills and iron-works sent forth their ceaseless signs and sounds of labour. Above all rose the green undulating slopes of the hills, where merchants had built themselves pleasant nests to live in, so that in a few minutes they could exchange the scene of labour and toil, which furrows the brow and whitens the hair, for the calm delights of home, where the furrows are smoothed away by the light and love and laughter of feminine companionship ; those ministering spirits who, like Minna Troil, are, or should be, " a little lower than the angels." From the heights above the town we had looked long upon one of the finest and most startling

panoramas in the world. We had visited all the old curiosity shops in Bergen, and L. had half ruined himself in buying silver ornaments, ancient cups, formidable daggers, horns and rugs, for distribution amongst friends in England.

It was about five o'clock, and we were then standing on the quay of the principal harbour with our backs to the old gateway. In front of us, on the other side of the harbour, the old *El Dorado* was getting up steam, and I am bound to say that the outside of the cup and the platter was magnificent in new paint. At six o'clock she was to start on her uncertain journey—for in the last hour long streaks of thin vaporous cloud had been flying and flashing hither and thither across the blue of the sky. It might be that a tempest would shortly arise, and the sea run mountains high.

L. had been silent for quite five minutes, a thing with him rare and unexampled. We had made one or two remarks, but they had evidently not penetrated beyond the outer surface of the brain. At last he spoke.

"Don't you remember?" he cried with quite startling energy. "The Graces were to cross over to England this very day in that boat. Second-sight has been at work, and I have just seen them standing all three on deck, looking as anxious as though they felt they had a *mauvais quart d'heure* before them."

"What shall we do?" I asked, as much interested as L., though not gifted with second-sight.

"Do? Cross over at once in that ferry now approaching, and go off to the steamer. We shall find them all three watching the gangway and wondering whether we are amongst the passengers."

The little ferry darted up to the pier, landed her human freight, and in a few moments had darted off again. We soon found ourselves on the quay close to the *El Dorado*. The crowd on board looked formidable, and people were streaming up the gangway, struggling with bags and baskets and long fishing-rod cases: signs and tokens of a sojourn in Norway.

"I would not be crossing with them for their weight in gold," said L., perhaps not exactly meaning what he said. But the crowd certainly looked curiously uninteresting. All the carriages of the town seemed to have been brought into requisition, rattling up one after another.

"And still they come," said L. "Something like the procession at Fiva that hospitably offered the Daneheims beer and presented them with penny whistles. Let us go on board in search of the Graces."

The search was a very short one, for there, just as L. had predicted, stood the three Graces on deck, near the gangway. L. went first, and as he was not one to be passed over in a crowd, the Graces saw him and knew him at once.

"We were looking out for you, fancying you might be in Bergen,"

they said. "People are arriving from all quarters. We came in by train last night."

"And we arrived by boat this morning from Aalesund," said L. "I wonder we have not met in the course of the day. You did not patronise Holdt's Hotel?"

"No. It was only for one night, and we went to Smeby's. It is comfortable and convenient. We have also heard that there is a mighty Pandemonium in the neighbourhood of Holdt's."

"Of the worst description," laughed L. "Horrible brass bands playing their loudest against each other, until you feel as though you were going absolutely out of your mind. We shall be in for it to-night."

"Then you are not crossing?" paying us the compliment of a disappointed expression. "But you don't look as if you were. There is too much repose about you."

"At least you will be well supported," remarked L., indicating the ever-increasing crowd; the carriages were still rattling up, and the stream was still ascending the gangway.

"We rather dread it," said the Graces, looking very prettily nervous and unprotected. "But who do you think is on board? Who but the Dougal Cratur, as Scott has it in 'Rob Roy.' We beg his pardon—the MacDougall of MacDougall."

"The tame bear we left you with at Vik?" laughed L.

"The very same. We saw little more of him, for we spent Monday at the Vöringfos, and on Tuesday we left."

"Tell us about the Vöringfos. Were you enchanted with your excursion, and did you eat multebaer-and-cream in the house above the waterfall?"

"On that wide plain, where one breathed such glorious oxygen? We did, indeed, and thought of you with showers of good-wishes; since but for you we should have missed the best part of the excursion. But the actual fall was disappointing. We expected to see a much greater volume of water."

"Want of rain, and the snows all melted. One cannot make bricks without straw," laughed L. "But on the whole you are delighted. You have fallen in love with Norway. It cannot be otherwise."

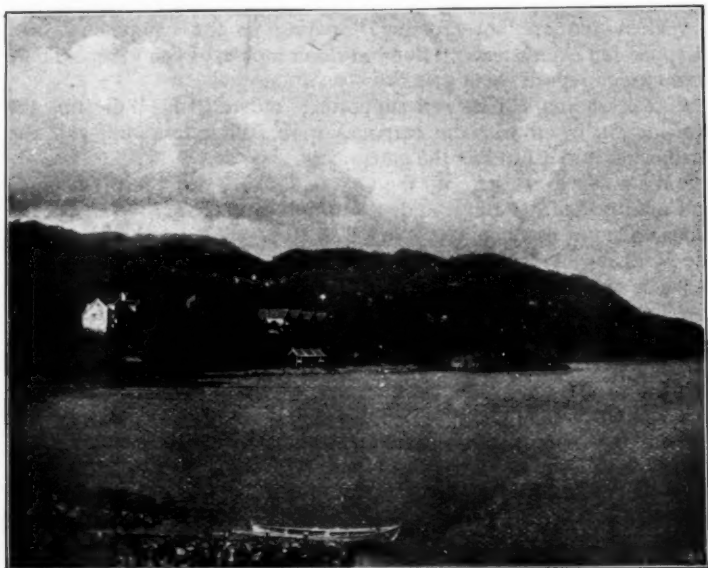
"Hopelessly and irrevocably," returned the Graces. "The country possesses an indescribable charm. We find it difficult to leave, and only do so with the full determination of returning next year."

"That is a general result. Norway attracts as certainly as the pole attracts the needle. To-morrow we have a new experience before us: nothing less than making acquaintance with a Norwegian seaside."

"Oh horror of horrors!" cried the Graces, affecting to shiver. "That sounds terribly like a day at Brighton or Margate, with bathing-machines, crowded sands, and minstrel melodies. Has Norway indeed gone the way of all the world and sunk so low?"

They were very far from guessing the truth—that *Os* was a refined earthly paradise of the first water, beautiful beyond a dream; and as yet we were not able to correct their mistaken but very natural impression. The very name sounded strange and eccentric to English ears, suggesting hideousness rather than beauty and charm. Could anything bearing the name of *Os* be comely and of good report? It seemed impossible.

We remained with the Graces until the last warning sounded, exchanging experiences, enjoying their lively description of all they had seen and heard.



SOLSTRAND.

By this time the steamer was indeed crowded. People elbowed each other, trod on each other's toes, and never stopped to beg each other's pardon. Ladies struggled up and down the companion with their impedimenta; those hidden mysteries in the form of bags and satchels that apparently came into the world with them and have clung to them ever since, so inseparable are they, and with such inscrutable expressions do they dive into their depths. They looked flushed and heated, but generally good-tempered under their afflictions. Or perhaps to them all this hurrying and struggling was not affliction, but a source of amusement. There are many who enjoy chaos and confusion and

promiscuous gatherings as part of the pleasures of travelling. Quietness and solitude would be inexpressibly tame and dreary. Where would the excitement come in?

"All this is really terrible," said L., looking upon the surging crowd. "It almost suggests danger—though I don't wish to alarm you. I really think you had better come off again, and cross over with us on Monday."

"Impossible!" cried the Graces, looking a little forlorn and frightened. "Our luggage is on board—and our best bonnets," they laughed. "Ladies would as soon part with their lives as with their best bonnets! No; we have cast in our lot and must abide by it. We must dree our weird, as the MacDougall would say. He actually recognised us and gave us a bow as he passed on with the stream."

Then we all shook hands and wished each other Bon-voyage, and left them standing there looking wistfully, not at L., but at the land they were forsaking; whilst we went down the gangway. The last order was given, the gangway withdrawn, the siren gave a prolonged shriek that echoed amongst the masts and rigging of the vessels and died away on the green slopes of the inner harbour; ropes were detached, and the *El Dorado* moved away with its crush and cargo of passengers. Slowly, carefully, she steered towards the mouth of the harbour, passed beyond it, turned sharply to the left, and was lost to sight.

We turned towards the town. The quays seemed suddenly deserted, the crowd had scattered, and the *El Dorado* had taken away an enormous number of people. Very few travellers were left in Bergen; the hotels were almost empty.

The sun was declining fast as we walked down the quay past the Rosenkranz Tower and King Haakon's Banqueting Hall; past the old Hanseatic houses, which still reared their heads as though bidding eternal defiance to the worthy burghers.

The harbour was now quiet, ferry-boats were less in evidence, the sky was flushed with red and the water reflected it. The fish-market was deserted; every one had gone home, and the boats were out at sea. To-morrow morning they would reappear laden with a shining cargo, and the babbling crowd would return, more disputing than ever.

That night we again had Pandemonium in the hotel, or rather in its neighbourhood; Pandemonium run to madness, seven times heated. It seemed that with the departure of the great crowd of travellers the town threw off all restraint and ran riot. The brass instruments appeared to lose control over time and tune, running up and down the scales without regard to what they were playing; improvising florid passages like the trills and roulades of a prima donna. One band broke into a religious chorus with all its might and main, another shrieked off into a frivolous dance. They might have been intoxicated,

or they might have gone mad. The air was full of excruciating discords; the people seemed possessed with a demon of sound. The faster the music, louder the crashing, the more they applauded; clapping hands, shouting themselves hoarse, playing the devil's tattoo, adding to the general chaos.

The next morning L. came to my room on his way to breakfast, and we proceeded together.

"They out-Heroded Herod last night. I feel quite pale and wan," he said, as he sat down, his face a magnificent bronze, his large blue eyes sparkling with energy, and a feast in front of him that ought to satisfy even a son of Anak.

"It all ceased at midnight, my dear L.; you must have had at least seven hours' good sleep."

"I don't know that," ruefully. "When one Pandemonium ended, another began, this time in closer quarters: a selfish wretch who stumbled into the next room at one in the morning, played at football with his boots, then harangued a crowd. I am sorry to say he was an Englishman, and apparently was putting up for Parliament—a good member to represent a temperance constituency!—and when I gave him a strong reminder upon the door—why *will* they have these doors of communication between all the rooms abroad?—he called out: 'Hot water? Take away. Come again next week.' It was really going from Scylla to Charybdis. If I were staying here to-night, I would change my room. I wonder whether the Graces are having rolls for breakfast this morning?" changing the subject. "How I pity them amongst that awful crowd!"

"Every man's house is his castle. They will indulge in the solitude of their cabin if too ill to appear on deck."

"I believe the weather has calmed down again," said L. "Going out on to my balcony just now, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. How favoured we have been all through!"

We had indeed, and we felt it keenly as we journeyed that morning towards Os.

The country was particularly beautiful and varied, a little different from the ordinary Norwegian type, replacing some of its wild grandeur by more softness and luxuriance. The railway was a narrow-gauge, and the carriages were of curious formation, with room in each for about a dozen people.

Ours was filled with the respectable merchant class, and their wives aimed at being fashionable in feathers, flounces and laces; passing out of the true, simple, admirable Norwegian character into a state of slight pretension and artificiality, by which they lost considerably in interest, whilst the picturesque element was altogether sacrificed.

"These people have risen with the progress of the country," said L. in undertones, looking at them with something like sorrow in his eyes. "Their new riches sit uncomfortably upon them; and they are as fussy

as a hen with one chick. One might quote the old saying, and declare them neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring. I don't know how it is, but they make one feel almost as though we were no longer in Norway."

"An element only found in such a place as Bergen," I replied. "Here people rise quickly to unaccustomed wealth: and having no higher leader than themselves, form their own social laws. The result is what you see. I don't think you would find this in the neighbourhood of Christiania, for instance, where water is much more likely to find its own level; and I am quite sure that at heart the majority of Norwegians have not deteriorated. What they will be fifty years hence, if the country increases in wealth, is another matter. Success is a dangerous thing; it is easier to win laurels than wear them; and riches misunderstood or misapplied are often fatal to character."

After this peroration we kept silence for a time, lost in admiration of the varied and striking country, now steaming through broad plains rich in orchards, now skirting a lake, now circling round an amphitheatre of hills steeped in purple mists. Every now and then we drew up at a small primitive station. A few people alighted who had evidently been marketing in Bergen, and were returning with their week's supply of necessities. Few entered.

Not the slightest attention was paid by the Norwegians in our carriage to the splendid scenery, and perhaps it was hardly to be expected. With the greater part of mankind familiarity breeds indifference, and this essentially applies to the beauties and perfections entering into their daily lives; whether beauties of nature, of face and form, or of character. Only with the very thoughtful, those susceptible to the higher impressions, does beauty, like genius, *grow*, so that every day, and day by day, fresh merits are seen, each day more loved and prized. The love of the beautiful is a religion in itself, and its cultivation cannot fail to ennoble, for it unconsciously leads to all that life and expansion of soul, which soon learns that even the highest earthly charms only create an infinite desire for something beyond them and more enduring.

Arrived at Os, we had still a journey before us on foot. Most of the travellers had *trilles* to meet them; we had none and wanted none; especially as a cart from the hotel took charge of our luggage.

Some twenty people had come out to pass the Sunday in fresh air, and perhaps a few more would arrive by the later train; but the season was over, and with it the rush to the sea. Those who did come were wise. The air of Bergen is close and relaxing. It lies shut in by the high hills surrounding it, and one breathes freely only when the wind blows up the harbour. More often than not, it rains; and rainy weather in Bergen plunges every one into the depths of melancholy. Nothing more depressing can be imagined.

So we left Os behind us, and with it the objectionable name;

sometimes spelt *Ose*, as pronounced. Our destination was *Solstrand*, a word we thought much more poetical and suggestive.

The uninteresting village possessed no special beauty; but beyond it a cluster of houses stood on what looked a lake, and was really a part of the fjord running up into the land, infinitely picturesque with all their gables reflected in the sparkling water. Above them stood the white church with its tower and small steeple nestling against a background of wooded hills. The road led by the lake-side until we reached a bridge, crossed it, and followed the road on the other side, with wooded slopes to our left, where fir-trees grew tall and strong.



THE PROCESSION OF NUNS.

The day was intensely hot and brilliant; through the deep blue sky overhead the sun took his fiery course; it might have been July rather than September. What we were going to could not be imagined. Mr. Bennett had entered into no descriptions; had merely said we should be charmed, and we had asked for no further details.

But now it seemed that we were altogether leaving the world behind us. Pursuing the winding road we lost sight of lake, houses, and village. Still we went onwards, and nothing appeared in the way of human habitation or humanity itself. This might be the right road or

the wrong ; might lead onwards to Solstrand or back to Bergen ; there was no one to direct us.

"It is all very charming, very lonely, desolate, and romantic," said L., laughing, "but I feel like Robinson Crusoe on his desert island. What is to prevent us from walking until we reach the North Pole? Apparently there is no end to this lonely road."

But as he spoke, we reached an inviting path through a plantation, too suggestive to be passed by.

"A short cut to Solstrand," I remarked, turning into it, and beginning to climb upwards.

"Or the North Pole," laughed L. "What *is* Solstrand, by the



SOLSTRAND.

way? All the hotel porter could say when we spoke to him was *Solstrand*. I thought we were coming to *Os*. Bennett never said a word about Solstrand. What *can* it be?"

"I don't know. A village, I suppose ; or perhaps a solitary hotel. We must take it upon trust. Won't your second-sight come in and help us?"

"Absolutely dormant," laughed L. "Perhaps to make up for my want of sleep last night. Faculties overstrained take their revenge. Like cultivated fields, there comes a time when they must needs lie fallow."

The wood was delightfully cool and shady. Gleams of sunshine reached us through the branches, stirred by a slight breeze; shadows fell across the plantation; a few birds flew about, disturbed by our presence; and here and there a squirrel ran up the trees. Everything was silent. The enjoyment of the quiet influence was intense, in spite of a little anxiety as to whether we were in the right way. We reached the end of the wood, only to come on another straight, white, and apparently endless thoroughfare.

"Yes, it has been a short cut," laughed L. "We have escaped a good bit of the road; but how much lies before us?"

Again we went on, until presently reaching the summit, there suddenly lay spread before us one of the loveliest and most marvellous views in creation.

A long stretch of heath beautiful in colour, soft and springy to the tread. To the right and left the coast sloped in broken and romantic outlines to the water. An immense landlocked bay slept and shimmered in the sunshine. Islands rose out of the water, rocky and dreamlike. Marvellous hills, steeped in a purple haze, stretched completely round the bay or fjord, so that the entrance from the sea beyond was lost.

Nothing could be purer than the blue of the water, unless it was the blue of the heaven above. Not a ripple disturbed its surface, and not a cloud passed over the heavens. The flowing undulations of the half-veiled hills seemed to fade into the sky. Soft and dreamlike was the scene; not suggestive of Norway, or of rugged wildness, stern and cold, but rather recalling the voluptuousness of the south. Yet never had we there seen such colouring, atmosphere so intensely brilliant.

We both stood spell-bound. The view had come upon us so suddenly that it affected the mind like magic, dazzling to sight and sense.

"Even Molde is not equal to this," said L. "In fact nothing of its kind we have seen in Norway is quite equal to it."

I think he was right. It was in the highest degree romantic. There was solitude also, for in front of us, a little way down the slope, we observed a long gabled house standing alone, which proved to be Solstrand. So after all we had taken the right road.

"And we ought to have known we should do so," said L. "It is part of our infallibility. Have we once gone wrong?"

So when we had a little broken the spell of the scene, and come out of our delighted amazement, we went down to the solitary house and sought the landlord. He was soon found, and was specially pleased to do us honour, because we were Englishmen.

"The English never come," he observed. "The place is not known to them. If it were, they would flock to this paradise, and the hotel would pay. As it is, I have nothing but Norwegians, and most of those for the Sunday. It is not enough, especially for our short season."

He was quite right. If the English knew of this paradise they would hurry to it, and spend summers there, revelling in the bathing and boating, the marvels and splendours of nature which really defy description.

Above all, there was something infinitely restful and soothing and peaceful about Solstrand and the fjord; a world of repose. The hotel itself was charming, exceedingly well managed, and on a most liberal scale; a light, airy, picturesque house, with four large gables and numerous balconies. Evidently it had been intended for four houses, and possessed four separate staircases. We had one of the blocks entirely to ourselves, and altogether there were not more than twenty people in the hotel.

"No Pandemonium to-night," laughed L. "We shall sleep in peace."

"This is paradise after Bergen," said the landlord. "Here you have fresh air and quiet; it is much only to sleep in a place so beautiful. I know much of Europe, but do not know a scene to surpass it. Bergen stifles one, and there I should be dead in six months from want of air. I have done so much to bring people here; everything for their comfort has been thought of. But it is not known—it is not known. The English do not come."

He seemed to look upon it as a calamity, and no doubt it meant everything to him. Yet he must have been full of enterprise. To find such an hotel in this far-away spot was amazing; to take it required no small courage; the faculty of hope in large excess. But it will become known some day, if he can bide his time; and then he will need to build wings to his house, and dependencies—and still people will overflow.

Our host was a small man, full of quiet energy, who moved and spoke softly; a man exceedingly intelligent, and with a certain amount of sensitiveness, which perhaps he would have been better without. People who must do battle with the world should possess no delicate joint in their armour. His well-ordered dining-room was furnished with small tables, and from our own table in one of the windows we looked out upon the matchless panorama. The chef was a *cordons bleu*, and his menu erred on the side of liberality. How with his moderate charges he made it pay was a mystery, unless he was more of a magician than the clerk in Segovia the Beautiful, and could make two and two count five. A great charm was the quietness with which everything was done, so that the hotel seemed to share in all the outward repose. It possessed many verandahs, and was so built that each verandah was a little world to itself, separated from the rest of mankind. Creepers of rich colour grew up the trellis-work, adding to the picturesqueness of the building. Here one could sit and survey the scene in the utmost luxury of retirement.

Between the hotel and the cliff a garden of flowers had been cultivated with much labour. Enormous roses still bloomed and scented

the air, and there were tennis-courts at a little distance. Standing at the edge of the cliff, we overlooked the small stone landing-pier, round which clustered a fleet of rowing boats.

It was not to be resisted, and soon after our arrival we went down, detached one of the boats, and launched forth upon the still waters.

By this time it was afternoon, with evening not so very far off, and the sun was travelling westward. The air was warm and balmy, and scarcely a breath stirred the surface of the fjord. We made for the island with its rocks and trees, and landed without difficulty. As we did so, a wild bird rose with a scream of fright or anger, and



FISH-MARKET, BERGEN.

soaring upwards winged its way towards the sea, followed by its startled mate. The very air in its stillness seemed to resent the sound, for the scream of a bird can be shrill and weird.

"This reminds one of our day at Molde," said L., "when we landed on the island with the Daneheims—but with a difference," he quaintly added.

"The difference being——?"

"That we are without our friends, and minus that hamper of delicacies so gracefully presided over by Countess Daneheim. This is the very day, I think, they were to arrive at Copenhagen; so perhaps they

are now basking in the smiles of royalty. But even royal favours must give way to such scenery as this, and I envy them not. Yet I envy royalty the Daneheims. How charming Solstrand looks!" pointing to the distance. "A winter in Stockholm and a summer here, and surely we should have reached the Ultima Thule of happiness—*le pays des amours*."

And in his clear baritone, he sang out :—

"Dites, la jeune belle
Où voulez-vous aller?
La voile ouvre son aile,
La brise va souffler."

The words rang over the water and floated through the air, and he seemed to wait for the answer.

"Next winter—and Stockholm," came the words, but whether I uttered them, or whether they came from Undine in the depths of the fjord, or from some spirit invisible, I never knew. L. looked mystified and dreamy.

The shores lay stretched before us, our hotel with its four great gables nestling on the green slopes. Over the hills beyond it the roofs of some of the houses of the village of Solstrand could just be discerned.

To the left of the hotel, a wide space between, an enterprising Bergen merchant, with a love of the beautiful in his soul, had built a solitary house and made himself a garden of roses and other sweet-scented flowers. Here he spent all his leisure time, and called his house *Mon Repos*; and if the name was not specially original, it could never have had a truer application. Rest, indeed; and infinite charm and beauty. Surely evil must become good, and good go on to perfection under this celestial influence. The magic of colouring was over all; such colouring as we only find in these northern latitudes.

We remained upon the water until the sun sank low, and shadows crept over hills and fjord; then returning to the little pier, made fast our boat, climbed the slopes, and reached the hotel just as the gong sounded for dinner.

The next morning again found us upon the fjord, this time avoiding the island and turning up a creek to the left, to investigate the land.

The waters gradually narrowed to a distant point, and the slopes were wooded, with here and there cultivated fields between, and an occasional farm-house. One or two boats were rounding the point as we entered, making their way to Solstrand to attend the village church: men and women in picturesque costumes, stiff and neat as though just turned out of a bandbox.

People here are not quite separated from mankind, for the Hardanger boats occasionally call, bringing news and merchandise from the outer world. But the few inhabitants are primitive and unsophisticated, simple, straightforward and single-minded; removed by a vast distance

from the element we had met in the train, and which had found no favour in L.'s eyes.

It was Sunday morning, but we had no church to go to. For the rest, a quiet morning on these solitary waters was a wholesome influence for body, soul, and spirit; the finest temple in the world built by human hands could not equal these grand creations of nature: these high hills and desolate wooded slopes, pregnant with meaning, full of silent voices. If we could not hear them, read, mark, and learn, so much the worse for us.

After luncheon, when the sun was high in the heavens, and the waters of the fjord were flashing their jewels, and the air seemed full of rainbow-colours, and all nature laughed and sang for very joy of the beautiful, we walked over the soft and scented heath and up the white dusty road towards the village of Solstrand. There was a strange exhilaration in the air; a glorious oxygen, intoxicating as a draught of wine; our feet scarcely seemed to touch the earth, and L. laughingly looked for wings.

"I feel that I am flying, not walking," he declared. "I am all astral body, and have shaken off the shackles of mortality."

"For an astral body, my dear L., you have just made an excellent luncheon. Perhaps the sauterne you indulged in contributed to your present flying sensations. But pray don't shake off the shackles of mortality just yet. I cannot dispense with my companion and return to England haunted by the Dead March in Saul."

"On the whole, I will try to oblige you," he laughed. "I cannot say that this sort of experience makes one tired of life. But only imagine for a moment the awful loss if we had sailed for England on Friday and missed this paradise. The possibility does not bear contemplation. We owe Bennett a double debt of gratitude, and must present him with a testimonial. If the Graces were here to help us out with our admiration and invent superlatives, I should say this was superior to Vik, though that Sunday at Vik lingers in one's mind as the experience of a lifetime."

"It was this year's first impression of Norway, and therefore all potent. We might call Vik the text, and its surroundings the context: the Vöringfos, the multebaer-and-cream on those wide and breezy heights, those vast plains above the world; and the three Graces, who so pleasantly fill in the canvas of the picture."

"Quite true," returned L. "And, *du reste*, comparisons are odious. Each to itself. Vik was perfect, and this is perfect."

Walking, we had been puzzled by a scene in the distance; something like a procession of mourning nuns in slow and solemn movement, following, it might be, one of its community to the grave.

"What can it possibly be?" said L., whose vision as a rule seemed unlimited. "Nuns they are not," he continued; "for this is not a Roman Catholic country, and all their religious orders would find no favour here."

And then, as we approached, the mystery was solved. Our procession of nuns proved nothing more formidable than hay perched upon long poles for drying purposes. But even as we approached the illusion was perfect and ridiculous.

A little way beyond it was a house of Norwegian build, picturesquely reposing at the end of an avenue of trees. The field was open to the road, and as we stood in the centre of the nuns, amused at the startling resemblance, an elderly man with white hair came forth and approached us. He was tall and dignified, and walked slowly, as though the burden of years were beginning to tell upon him.

"I see, sirs," he began in excellent English, "that you are strangers and Englishmen; and Englishmen in Solstrand are rare as angels' visits."

"We have been much exercised, and in the distance took these long effigies of hay for a procession of nuns," said L. "The resemblance is still startling."

"It is very remarkable, and would deceive any one," returned our new acquaintance. "Yet more so when the shades of night are gathering. Sometimes, passing after dark, they have looked so like a group of mourners that I have felt my flesh quite creep, and to destroy the illusion have been obliged to go up and pass my hands over the hay. A foolish fancy. But we all have fancies all through life, and they do not diminish with age. I have reached the allotted term, but the air of Solstrand may well give me another ten years. You will do me the honour to come in, sirs, and I will show you my little Norwegian house and garden. My summer house I call it, for I spend my winters in Christiania."

It was impossible to decline an invitation so given, and we willingly accompanied our host down his avenue, passing through open French windows into his dining-room, a room quite Norwegian, the walls of pale wood, and everything about it light and cheerful. In the side windows he had introduced some stained glass, which threw a pleasant tone over all. On the table stood two decanters of wine and dishes of fruit. It might have been an English dessert-table.

"You will allow me to offer you hospitality," said our entertainer, placing chairs for us; and all was said and done in so matter-of-course a way that again we found it impossible to refuse. "This is sweet Malaga, and this is old Madeira," indicating the wines. "Very old Madeira," with a smile. "It is the remnant of a large stock laid down by my grandfather seventy years ago, when I was born; his first grandson: indeed the only grandchild he ever had. My father did likewise when *his* grandson was born: my son, who is married and lives in Christiania. It will not be touched until I am gone. Therefore," smiled the old gentleman, "if I live so many years beyond the allotted span, my son may justly complain that I am keeping him not only out of his patrimony but out of his wine-cellar."

"The longer you live, sir," said L., "the happier I am sure your son will be. You give me the impression of having been a most indulgent father."

"I had but one child, therefore can plead *circonstances atténuantes*," returned our host deprecatingly. "But truly my son was one whom no indulgence could spoil. Perhaps I have been more favoured than he, for he has half-a-dozen sons, and dare not indulge them. Sirs," continued this singular but delightful old gentleman, "it gives me true pleasure to see you here, though we are strangers to each other. But you are Englishmen, and that is enough for me. I have been much in



GOING UP THE TYNE BY MOONLIGHT.

England, have received great kindness from the English, and am never so happy as when I can even in the faintest degree and for a moment return a little of their hospitality. The English do not come here. This paradise is unknown to them. They land at Bergen, rush off again by the first steamer, probably the very same day, and return just in time to catch their steamer back to England. Poor Solstrand is neglected; and yet you see what it is—a spot such as there are few in Norway. Ah! my poor wife! How she loved it! I lost her five years ago, and I have been lonely ever since. But now, let us go *autour de mon jardin*, as Alphonse Daudet would say. Stay—is it Alphonse Daudet?"

"Alphonse Karr, I think," suggested L.

"Ah, sir," said the old gentleman, shaking his head, "you have the advantage of me! Your memory is fresh and young, and has life before it; mine all lies behind me. I always mix up those two men, and yet how different they are!"

Here also, surrounding the house, we found a paradise of flowers, and our host spoke of many different kinds and seemed to love them all.

"They are a great resource," he said. "I sit on my lawn with a favourite book and all my flowers around me; flowers of every hue and every scent. The rose mingles its perfume with the mignonette, the mignonette with the jasmine. Every separate perfume recalls chapters in my life; happy days that can never come again. *Ah, les beaux jours de la vie!* I have now to think of those that are to come."

It only needed such an experience as this to complete the impression Solstrand had made upon us, and when we bade our kindly host good-bye and wended our way back to the hotel, we felt we left a new-made friend behind us and had ceased to be strangers in the place.

Later on we were seated on the verandah, taking tea, waiting our hour of departure, feasting our eyes for the last time upon the wondrous view stretched out before us: the calm waters of the fjord, the sleeping mountains, the blue sky overhead, and the sun sinking westward.

"It has indeed been paradise," said L.; "and now we are going back to Pandemonium, where, as our landlord puts it, one might die of asphyxiation. Never have I left any place with greater regret."

He picked the leaf of a creeper running up the trellis-work and placed it carefully in his pocket-book. It had taken its autumn colours, and was very beautiful.

"I shall keep that as long as I live," he said; "and whenever I look at it, shall think of our Sunday together at Solstrand."

At this moment our landlord came up to us.

"I am sorry you are leaving, sirs," he remarked, "and wish you were staying till to-morrow morning at least. Your stay has been too short, and you will look back on Solstrand as upon a dream. But at least you have been comfortable?"

As comfortable, we assured him, as we had ever been in our lives.

"You have only to be patient," said L. "If you can afford to wait, the English will come, and all other nations as well. And when this earthly paradise is known they will flock to you with a rush. Then it will lose some of its charm and repose, but you will make a fortune."

"I hope you are a true prophet, sir," said the landlord, looking delighted. "You inspire me with new life."

"I have the gift of second-sight," laughed L., "and see it all before me. In ten years from now you will be a rich man."

"Sir," returned the landlord, "let your words come true, and if ever you honour me again with your presence, there is nothing you may command that shall be impossible."

As we had walked up to Solstrand, so we preferred to walk back to the station in the quiet Sunday afternoon. It really seemed ages since yesterday, so vivid and emotional had been our experiences. The country people we met on the road were all in their Sunday costumes, and many of the women carried their prayer-books in folded handkerchiefs, wending their way to church, and looking solemn and serious. Outside the church many groups were waiting the moment for entering.

We continued our way to the station, where the train also waited its hour to strike, and as it whistled and took its departure, we felt we were leaving behind us one of the loveliest spots in all Norway, and had laid up in store for the time to come one of our happiest recollections.

On entering Bergen it seemed to have grown old and dilapidated in the last twenty-four hours, less interesting and picturesque; the air was stifling and oppressive; odours reigned in the streets which were not the mingled perfumes of roses, mignonette and jasmine found in the garden of our new-found friend; Holdt's Hotel appeared gloomy and neglected; all the glorious oxygen had been left behind. We looked back upon Solstrand with intense regret, upbraiding ourselves for not remaining in our paradise until Monday morning.

Our old waiter was in attendance, for the sole pleasure, he declared, of waiting upon one whom he had served in the happy years gone by, when Herr Holdt was alive and everything in the hotel went merry as a marriage bell. He apparently had bribed the chef to send us up a small but sumptuous supper, under the influence of which Bergen again became quite tolerable.

"You depart to-morrow night, sirs," he said in melancholy tones; "and then there will be no one left; we may as well shut our doors until next year. Bergen in winter is very dreary. And every year I grow older, and don't know what the next year may have in store for me. We working-people mostly grow old before our time. Ah, sir, those were happy days when Herr Holdt reigned. I was twenty years younger than I am now, and thought I should live for ever. But I remember no one, sir, of those days as I remember you."

This was a very prettily wrapped-up compliment, which would have to be paid for by-and-by. Our old waiter was not exactly in the condition of his forefathers, who had been simple, primitive rustics. Yet he was genuine enough and very willing, and it was a pleasure both to see a well-known face about one, and to be waited upon by the good old man; and when all is said and done, it is better to receive compliments which may be diplomatic than to be waited on with a gloomy indifference.

After supper we took a long walk down the quays towards the mouth of the harbour. It was Sunday night, and everything was at rest. There was no loading and unloading; no chorus of voices;

no ferries darting to and fro; no sound or movement on board any of the vessels. We had the world to ourselves. The Rosenkranz Tower loomed out of the darkness, and Haakon's Banqueting Hall was as silent as the tomb of that far-distant king.

"What a remarkable solitude and desertion!" said L. "It seems almost weird and ghostly; a phantom city and a phantom scene. But presently will come the dawn in the east, when everything will wake up again, the cocks crow, and the world rouse itself with a weight upon its mind—the weight of Black Monday."

Nevertheless there was a great charm in the hour. It was sufficiently light to discern the picturesque outlines of many of the vessels, the forests of masts, the lights that gleamed here and there like silent watchdogs, the dim forms of the gabled warehouses across the water, and the yet more indistinct undulation of the hills beyond.

This was not one of Bergen's rainy nights; so far we were favoured. The sky was cloudless, and the stars shone with intense brilliancy. As we went on and on, lured by the splendour of the night, the quietness and repose lying upon all, we neared Bergenhus Castle, which defends the harbour, and in days gone by had fired upon Sandwich as he pursued the Dutch fleet into the port. And here we began to feel that there was a freshness in the air and more than a suspicion of autumn. On the opposite side stretched Nordnaes, with its Observatory and Frederiksberg, but of the ghosts of the dead-and-gone monks there was not a trace. The neighbourhood of Bergen is too matter-of-fact for the ghostly element. No siren sent forth its shrill scream as token of a steamer's approach or departure; our own footsteps alone woke the echoes, our voices alone broke the silence: these, and the slight southing and moaning of a wind that suddenly sprang up from the sea, and made us wonder if, after all, to-morrow were destined to a change of weather.

But the next morning rose fair and fine as ever, and we were favoured up to the last. For it was the dawning of our last day, and there was melancholy in the thought.

"We look back upon an uninterrupted series of triumphs," laughed L. "Our infallibility has kept up its reputation, and my second-sight has occasionally been of use. Now to-day we have to keep faith with our lady of Skje."

A few minutes before two found us at her door. She was in her drawing-room, ready with a warm welcome. All signs of the worry and anxiety we had noticed on Saturday had disappeared.

"You have succeeded in your object," I remarked, after the first greetings had passed. "I see by your expression that the source of your trouble is removed."

"Perfectly," replied our lady of Skje, looking radiant and victorious. "I had my interview with the wretched man on Saturday, and spoke

out my mind very freely, and told him some home truths. He was surprised that I knew so much about him, and had the grace to be somewhat ashamed of himself. 'I will reform,' said he. 'You cannot do better,' I returned. 'But my niece shall never run the risk of marrying a reformed husband. I know that you do not really care for her; you are incapable of true affection; and if you cajole her into marrying you, I affirm, by all I hold most sacred, that she shall never inherit one single kroner from me.' The wretch had some trouble to conceal his rage and disappointment; if he could safely have murdered me there and then I don't believe I should be here now to receive you; but fortunately murder brings its punishment. He looked as black as night as he replied: 'I am sincerely attached to your niece, but am not in a position to marry a penniless bride. If you cruelly persist in separating two devoted hearts, may the consequences of our blighted lives rest upon your head.' 'Sir,' I said, 'I will risk the consequences. And now our interview is ended. Do not ever darken my doors again, and never again attempt to cross my niece's path. On that condition you have not only my good wishes for your immediate reformation, but also for your future welfare.' And I myself accompanied my gentleman to the door, and closed it upon him with a snap."

"And your niece?" asked L. "Were you equally successful in that quarter?"

"I had much less trouble than I anticipated. The matter had not gone very far, and was not very deep seated. I was forced to tell her a little of what I knew about him. It was quite sufficient to open her eyes and bring unpleasant disillusion: a sharp probe and soon over. But what do you think quite clinched the matter?" smiled our lady of Skje.

"Impossible to say. Perhaps the offer of a new bonnet or ball-dress, or a *voyage en Suisse*."

"You are not so very far wrong. 'My dear Olga,' I said, 'I have only your happiness and welfare at heart. Marry this wretch you cannot and shall not; and if you will give me your word of honour to hold no further communication with him, I will take you next year to the Paris Exhibition.' 'The Paris Exhibition!' she cried, 'but that has been the dream of my days ever since I heard they were going to have one!' And the dear girl burst into delighted tears, threw her arms round my neck, and declared she would give up ten lovers at my bidding."

And here our lady of Skje, fairly overcome herself, drew a delicate lace handkerchief from her own pocket, and applied it to her own eyes. "Hush," she said the next moment, recovering her composure, "here she comes. Not a word."

The door opened, and a pretty, graceful girl entered, with a great deal of bright fair hair and a brilliant complexion. She looked about twenty, and spoke very good English, though not so perfectly as

the older lady. They were pleasant, hospitable people, not at all in the rank of life of the Kantlows and the Daneheims, and quite without that nameless air of distinction which is by no means always found amongst those entitled to it. Our lady of Skje and her niece belonged to the middle class of society; but wealth had surrounded them with a certain refinement, and they both possessed the great merit of being natural and sincere. Of pretension and ostentation they knew nothing, and thus were really gentlewomen.

The house was furnished with much quiet taste, and the walls were hung with admirable pictures of the modern school. Amongst them



NEWCASTLE (THE POETRY OF SMOKE).

were some splendid examples of Sørensen and Bille, whose sea pictures it would be very difficult to equal.

"They are all of my husband's collecting," said our lady of Skje, as we paused before each with delight. "He was a true artist in his tastes, and nothing that was second-rate ever remained long in his house."

We had the evidence before us. All the pictures were in the first order of merit, though none of them to our thinking approached Sørensen; and L., who knew him less, was equally impressed by his genius.

"For a cargo of these," he laughed, "I would resign the old port, the multebaer, and the Molde marmalade!"

But it was not to be had; a Sörensen is never in the market, upon the principle that those who possess a really good thing know how to keep it.

Our lady of Skje treated us to a repast of great elegance and refinement, such as we thought Norway scarcely capable of producing. I have no space for details, which, moreover, might only prove tantalising; and when at four o'clock we took our departure, it was with a sincere esteem for both ladies.

"You will visit Bergen again," said our lady of Skje, "and you will not fail to come and see me. It should be the month of June, pleasantest of all months in Norway, before it grows too crowded. England? Oh no; I shall never visit England. The Paris Exhibition, to which we think of going next year"—with a very innocent and open glance at us—"will be an undertaking for me. We shall spend a whole month there, then hasten back to Norway—and to Skje. I shall need the repose of that little paradise!"

So we parted, with mutual handshakes and good wishes.

The gloaming was deepening into darkness. We had said our last good-bye to the old town, and were on board the steamer waiting the moment of departure. Though by no means crowded, yet more passengers had turned up at the last than were expected, and there was the usual gathering on shore to see us off. We were looking over the side, contemplating the bustle and confusion, turning our gaze to the outlines of Rosenkranz and Kongehall, when suddenly a voice sounded in our ears.

"I beg your pardon!"

It was a quiet, gentle voice, timid, retiring, almost deprecating. Not knowing it was addressed to us, we took no notice of it. Then it came a second time, a little nearer.

"I beg your pardon!"

We turned. A quiet, ladylike person, dressed in cloak and bonnet, was holding something towards us. "I beg your pardon!" she said for the third time, in English. "I think you are the gentlemen who were in our magazin this morning, and I had the honour of serving you."

Then we recognised her. It was quite true; L. had extensively invested in Norwegian jewellery and other *bric-à-brac*. We had thought at the time how modest and superior a young woman the attendant had seemed.

"Well," she continued, "you dropped this. I found it on the counter after you left, and came out to-night hoping to find you and return it to you."

And she held half a sovereign towards us, which glittered in the rays of a lamp.

It seemed incredible: first, that she should have taken this trouble to find us, and, secondly, that she should have been able to discover us amidst the crowd in the darkness of the night. But the lamplight falling full on our faces as we leaned over the bulwarks, had helped her in her quest.

Here truly was Norwegian honour and honesty: an example which infinitely touched us. The small sum seemed so inadequate to the trouble she had taken; for she had also gone to Holdt's Hotel, only to find that we had just left.

We both felt a rush of kindly feeling towards this humble and unknown gentlewoman. L. hastily examined his pockets, but not one single article did they possess which he could present to her in token of the gratitude and admiration of two Englishmen. My own pockets were equally barren. I had only a pencil-case inscribed, *F. M. F. S. to C. W. W. Semper Fidelis*: a treasure almost dear as life itself, never to be parted with: and we could only return a few warm thanks for this delicate and honest consideration.

But we thought more highly than ever of Norway and the Norwegians, if that were possible; and as the modest, quietly draped figure stood apart from the crowd and watched the steamer break away from the shore, we felt that it wafted us a GOD-SPEED which would surely land us, *sain et sauf*, in the fair haven of England.

Then the good ship *Mercur* passed out of the harbour, and was soon ploughing her way through the open seas under the quiet benediction of the stars.

THE RECALL

A DREAM OF THE GHETTO

SO far he led them through the Wilderness,
That not in dreams alone, he saw the Land
Long-promised: his it was at last, to stand
Humbly exalted—free from fears and stress,
And view the Distance without bitterness,
Beneath the Shadow of God's outstretched Hand:
And then, God touched him, making just, and grand
His Sleep, in its consummate loneliness.

Who would grudge death, if he might lead as far
As Moses led his flock, these sore distressed
Outcasts on alien hills? Loveless, unblest,
They prove each halting-place their griefs debar
From yielding rest: but where the fig-trees are,
And palms, Peace whispers,—“*Children, Home is best!*”

E. H.

A CENTURY OF AUNTS

I

Time, 1850

Miss ISABELLA CAMPBELL, *age 50*

Miss MARY CAMPBELL (*her niece*), *age 25*

Aunt Isabella (to her niece, who enters abruptly). My dear Mary, do be less boisterous in your movements. When I was a girl we always curtsied to our elders on entering and leaving a room.

Mary. I am glad we are less formal now than in those old-fashioned times.

Aunt I. Old-fashioned indeed! Let me tell you, Miss, I* have heard my Aunt Rebecca, your great-aunt, say that in her young days young people never sat down in the presence of their parents without asking their permission.

Mary (taking up some Berlin-wool work). Well, I think it was very ridiculous, that is all I can say.

Aunt I. You forget yourself strangely, Mary, when you express such sentiments, and I am surprised to see you doing fancy-work in the morning. When I was young we had so much to do making preserves, pot-pourri, cordials, home-made wines and lavender water, that we rarely sat down to our work in the summer till the afternoon, and then we had never time for anything but plain sewing, and thought ourselves very fortunate if we were allowed to make up new linen instead of darning stockings.

Mary. Oh! Aunt Isabella, I am so thankful I did not live in those days; you were never allowed to read any novels at all, were you?

Aunt I. Not until I was about your age, and then only after your grandmother had read them. I was permitted to read some of Sir Walter Scott's novels and a few of Jane Austen's, if she approved of them.

Mary. How dull you must have been! Did you play any games?

Aunt I. Oh dear, yes! We had a very pretty game called "Coronella"; it was a kind of shuttlecock, which we caught on a stick with a sort of cup at the end of it, something like a large bilboquet. Sometimes we played trap-bat-and-ball, but your great-aunt Rebecca, who brought me up, thought that tom-boyish; then Les Grâces, which you play, came in.

Mary. That reminds me my cousins have asked me to go there

this afternoon for a game. May I go? I can take Martha with me in the omnibus?

Aunt I. You know I don't approve of your going in an omnibus, but if you take Martha, I suppose I must consent. In my time gentlewomen never dreamt of driving in omnibuses; I am not sure that gentlemen did. I need hardly say I have never been inside such a plebeian vehicle in my life, but the world is a very different place now to what it was then.

Mary. It is much nicer now, I think.

Aunt I. There I cannot agree with you. I never drove out in London except in a carriage or a hackney-coach, and when Aunt Rebecca was a girl she never went out in London except in a closed carriage or a sedan-chair with the curtains drawn. There was more modesty in those days than there is now. Gentlewomen knew their place and kept in it, and saw to it that their inferiors did the same. There was no mixing indiscriminately with the democracy.

Mary. Perhaps we are growing humbler. But may I go?

Aunt I. No, it is not humility, it is a spirit of rebellion against authority; money, which is the root of all evil, asserting itself against birth. But you may go.

Mary. Thank you. I am going to ask Emily to lend me one or two new polkas to practise on the piano.

Aunt I. Polkas indeed! We had no such vulgar dances as polkas when I was a girl: we danced quadrilles and the Lancers with all the proper steps; there was no romping and no mere walking through the figures, and at the end of the evening we finished up with Sir Roger de Coverley. Aunt Rebecca used to be shocked at that, because in her days they danced nothing but minuets at balls.

Mary. What a slow, solemn dance!

Aunt I. It was a very graceful, stately dance, Miss; but gentlewomen were more dignified in those days, and gentlemen more chivalrous and courteous than they are now. I believe at private balls country-dances which were less stately were danced. Nowadays young people seem to do as they please in dancing as in everything else. We shall have that immoral dance, the waltz, as they call it abroad, introduced here next. I trust you will never learn it, Mary.

Mary (who is learning to waltz privately). If it becomes fashionable I must, Aunt Isabella; we must march with the times, or rather dance with them.

Aunt I. Oh, Mary, Mary! If your poor dear great-aunt Rebecca were alive, I really don't know what she would say! If she could hear you, I am sure she would turn in her grave.

Mary (desirous of changing the subject). Shall I get the *Times* and read the leading article to you?

Aunt I. Let me see what it is about first. Aunt Rebecca never allowed me to open a newspaper, though I believe she used to read the political articles and foreign news herself.

Mary. I can't find it. Tom must have taken it to see what time the music-hall opens that he is going to this evening.

Aunt I. (horrified). Really, Mary, you are getting utterly spoilt by this intercourse with your cousins. If I had dared to mention such a place to Aunt Rebecca, she would have sent me to my room for the rest of the morning. I beg you never to let me hear you allude to such a thing again. The present generation is quite devoid of all proper reticence. Should you ever have grown-up nieces, I blush to think what their manners and customs will be, unless some curb is put on the pace at which the world is going.

Mary. I daresay I shall be as shocked by my nieces as you are by me. Time will show.

II

Time, 1875

MISS MARY CAMPBELL, aged 50

MISS ALICE CAMPBELL (*niece*), aged 25

Aunt Mary. Alice, do put away that scribbling and get something useful to do. Where is your crewel-work? I never see you willingly take up a needle. You are always writing; it is scribble, scribble, scribble all the morning.

Alice. I am writing an article for a newspaper, Aunt Mary—a much more useful and more profitable employment than crewel-work, besides ever so much more to my taste.

Aunt M. What is the world coming to, I wonder? I was not allowed to read newspapers when I was a girl of your age; Aunt Isabella would have been horrified if I had dared to look at anything except the leading article in the *Times*, which I used to read aloud to her.

Alice. We have changed all that nonsense now. *Autres temps, autres mœurs.* I hope to edit a paper or a magazine some day.

Aunt M. Edit a magazine! What next? I trust, Alice, you don't mean to accept payment for that article which you are wasting the morning in writing?

Alice. Indeed I do. I expect a cheque for it, and I shall most certainly not refuse it.

Aunt M. Oh dear! The world is turned topsy-turvy. In my young days gentlewomen behaved like gentlewomen; they did not usurp the occupations of men as they do nowadays. We should have considered it most *infra dig.* for a lady to earn money; of course some poor ladies in reduced circumstances had to become governesses or companions, but they lost caste by so doing.

Alice. I am glad I live in times when the world is less snobbish and a little wiser than it used to be. We women are discovering we were

not sent into the world merely to spend our time in cutting holes in cambric and sewing them up again, or in working sunflowers in crewels, as you would like me to do. But I have finished my article, and now I am going to have a game of lawn-tennis.

Aunt M. Yes. Your amusements are on a par with your employments. Why can't you be content with a game of croquet, instead of playing a masculine game like lawn-tennis?

Alice. What did you play when you were a girl?

Aunt M. Archery was our principal amusement and *Les Grâces*, and very pretty graceful games they were. We did not get hot and red as you do at lawn-tennis, and there was no wild rushing about, or kicking up your heels, or putting yourself into ungraceful attitudes, and there were no ambiguous expressions in use like *Love* and *Love-all*.

Alice. Oh, Aunt Mary, tennis is an awfully jolly game.

Aunt M. (horrified). Pray, Alice, never use such a vulgar phrase in my presence again. Where did you pick it up?

Alice. Oh, from the boys; it is slang.

Aunt M. There was no such thing as slang in my youth; we never made use of such language, nor our brothers either, in our presence. I consider it most unladylike.

Alice. Oh, Aunt Mary, I quite forgot to tell you what I did the other day. You will be dreadfully shocked, I am afraid. What do you think it was?

Aunt M. Probably you played cricket with your brothers; that would not surprise me in the least.

Alice. I have given that up since I put my hair up. No, I went with Tom on the top of an omnibus.

Aunt M. (horror-stricken). Alice! And you dare to confess such a thing. Aunt Isabella was horrified when I used to go inside an omnibus, even when I had a maid with me. But to go outside! I never heard anything so shocking.

Alice. It was lovely. There was no room inside and I was very tired, so Tom suggested I should go outside; he and the conductor helped me up, and I sat by the driver on the box.

Aunt M. A more unladylike, hoydenish proceeding I never heard! But really what the young people of the present day are coming to, I do not know, and not being a prophetess I cannot pretend to say. I tremble to think what indiscretion the next generation will be guilty of, I really do.

Alice. Never mind the next generation. Here are some new books come in; some travels and biography for you, and some German literature and some novels for me.

Aunt M. No wonder the girl of the period is what she is when she reads every novel she comes across, no matter how improper it may be. Aunt Isabella always superintended my reading, and I never opened a new book without her permission.

Alice. You don't read German, Aunt Mary, so you could not super-

intend my German reading—which, by the way, might do me a great deal more harm than a few naughty novels.

Aunt M. Don't be pert, Alice. Young people nowadays have no respect for their elders; they seem to me to learn everything except manners and their duty to those in authority over them.

Alice. One can't be under authority all one's life, Aunt Mary; it is concession, not obedience, if I yield to you at my age.

Aunt M. Alice, I grieve to hear you speak in this way. Aunt Isabella used to blush in anticipation of what you would be like. I am sure I shake in my shoes when I think of what your nieces will do and say.

Alice. I confess I am very curious to know. We are going the pace, I must say, but time will show.

III

Time, 1900

MISS ALICE CAMPBELL, aged 50, editress of a *Lady's paper*.

MISS ENID CAMPBELL (niece), aged 25, her assistant.

Enid. Shall you want me to go out for you to-day, Aunt Alice?"

Aunt Alice. Yes, I want you to go to Camberwell to interview a minor poet this morning, and I think you might attend that meeting about Homes for Poor Ladies at Kensington instead of me this afternoon; you can take shorthand notes of the speeches. The heat knocks me up so even if I take a hansom. You will cycle, of course?

Enid. Oh yes, it is the quickest way; but it is as much as I care to do this hot weather, so I shan't go to hockey to-day. I will take you to a music-hall this evening, Aunt Alice, for a change.

Aunt A. No, thank you, dear! I draw the line at music-halls; they are places we never talked of when I was a girl.

Enid. Don't be prudish, Aunt Alice. It is one of the rare occasions when a girl really does want a chaperon. Of course I could get Dorothy Murray and her brother to go with me, but I would much rather you came. We can go on the top of a bus to the very door, or I'll stand a hansom.

Aunt A. No, dear; I am sorry to disappoint you, but I never have been to a music-hall, and I never intend to go to one. Really I do not know what girls will do next.

Enid. Oh! what tommy—

Aunt A. Hush, Enid! If you must use slang, do remember there are two kinds of slang—society slang and vulgar slang. The first I don't object to in moderation—in fact I often use it myself I confess, unconsciously; but the latter I really do protest against, and the expression you were about to use I abominate. Times have altered so since I was a girl; then only men and boys talked slang, now every

one does, more or less; but, as I say, only slang of a certain kind is admissible.

Enid. All right. But, Aunt Alice, why won't you let me take you to a music-hall? You must march with the times, and you especially, who edit a lady's paper, ought to go for the sake of the copy you would get out of it. Of course I should go only to a first-class one.

Aunt A. No, dear, you must excuse me. If you choose to go I can't prevent you, but I object most strongly; and it would be no use to me as "copy" because it is only done by a few fast people, and it is by no means usual even now for girls to go to such places.

Enid (pouting). Very well, I must go with the Murrays and take the latch-key, then I shan't keep any one up.

Aunt A. If you will give it up I will treat you to the opera to-night instead; you know I don't like going to the opera or a theatre without an escort, but I'll waive that for once, though when I was young we never went to a theatre without a gentleman. True there were no matinées then.

Enid. I am thankful I was born a quarter of a century later; it must have been awfully slow—no golf, no hockey, no bicycles, nothing but tennis.

Aunt A. Oh no, it was not. We had horses to ride, those of us who could afford it; but of course things are very different. My aunt, your great-aunt Mary, used to think it scandalous that I went on the top of an omnibus, and as for going about London alone as you do, it was considered very bad form and was only done by the lower middle-classes.

Enid. How supremely ridiculous! Just imagine what your life would be if you had to chaperon me everywhere. Why, we should never get through half our work, and how could I interview any one with a chaperon at my heels! Besides, you don't cycle, so it would be impossible.

Aunt A. Quite. I admit the cycle has crushed out the chaperon to a great extent. But it is time you started.

Enid. Oh, by the way, if mother comes in before you go, Aunt Alice, will you tell her she must not read that novel on the table! It is too much even for me, and I am not strait-laced. I doubt if she would understand it, but one must take care of one's mother's morals. I have not had time to look through the others yet; she can take the magazine to-day.

Aunt A. I wonder if you will ever write a novel, Enid? I think you have it in you to do so.

Enid. Oh yes, I feel I must one day, but not until the tide turns, and harmless unproblematical stories become the fashion. I should not at all like to write a novel that mother could not read.

Aunt A. Thank you, dear, for saying that. As I brought you up I feel responsible for you, and I am glad to know that, as I often tell your mother, the girls of the present day are really no worse than

we were. In fact I am not sure that they are not better, for they have more temptations and are less shielded than we were.

Enid. Not when they have an Aunt Alice with plenty of tact, and no old-maidish nonsense, to look after them. I never meant to go to a music-hall really; the Murrays asked me, but I refused. I only wanted to see what you would say.

Aunt A. I say if you don't start for Camberwell at once, I must interview that minor poet myself.

Enid. No, it is much too hot for you; besides, you are shy and I am not, I shall get much more out of him than you will. *À bientôt.* (*Exit.*)

Aunt A. (soliloquises). That girl is as good as gold. Manners, customs, and all things change, but human nature remains very much the same.

DARLEY DALE.

RONDEAU FOR CHRISTMAS 1900

TO light the year at Christmastide we raise
 The holly thronged with ruddy suns, and sprays
 Of moon-encumbered mistletoe we twist:
 So ice and fire and life and death have kissed,
 And sun and moon and night and day have praise.

Dear friend, when seasons lengthen out their days,
 These symbolled suns, evolving from the haze,
 Shall fill their lamps with gold and amethyst
 To light thy year.

When nights are lost in thick of flowery maze,
 These symbolled moons shall send athwart thy ways
 The silver atmosphere where dreams persist,
 And slow evolving from their films of mist
 Shall trim their horns with pearl and chrysoprase
 To light thy year.

ETHEL WHEELER.

ASSISI

AN IMPRESSIONIST SKETCH

FROM Rome to Assisi! From the great city on the Seven Hills to the small city on the one hill, above the Umbrian Plain. A little old walled town; a town in a garden; where the countryside melts into the streets, and the latter are like garden-paths with olive-yards and vineyards intersecting them, and glimpses of the purple hills at every street corner. And such feasts of colour everywhere. Grey, and buff, and burnt-sienna surfaces in the tall houses, silver in the olives, apple-trees which are so many symphonies in pink and white, almond bushes with their vieux-rose blossoms, cherry orchards a mass of snow-white bloom! A spring day at Assisi, here indeed the true "primavera." Radiant skies, glowing sunshine, hedgerows bursting into leaf, with March primroses and violets uplifting demure heads beneath.

Down on the plain is the great church of St. Mary of the Angels, built to enshrine the smallest church in the world, the Portiuncula of S. Francis—Portiuncula, *i.e.* a little gate. I spent an enjoyable hour in the wide cool spaces of Santa Maria degli Angeli, while its treasures were pointed out to me by the brown-froked Frate, who offered himself, a courteous cicerone. Under the cupola of the big church is the little church of "Francis," as my guide invariably designates him. It is an oblong box-like structure, scarcely as large as an ordinary ball-room, but preserved jealously in precisely the same condition as in its founder's lifetime. In it, the low, rapid, clear-toned accents of the Frate assure me, Francis prayed, and here close by is the cell where he died on that October night when his "little sisters," the birds, left their nests and came to sing a requiem over him. And here is the Capella delle Rose, which Francis's dear friend and brother, Bonaventura, erected over the spot. And now to the rose-garden. See! Signora, the thornless rose-trees. Ah! The Signora will know the story, doubtless? Yes, Francis sorely tempted of the Evil One to return to the pleasures of the world and a life of ease, sought to overcome the temptation of Satan by casting himself one night into a thicket of briars here, just here, where now the roses grow. And rolling himself in them till his body was all torn and bleeding he fought the Tempter, when a heavenly light appeared in the darkness, and behold, the cruel briars were changed into fairest rose-bushes in fullest bloom, and a voice called sweetly, "Come, Francis, bring roses," and angels led him to the Portiuncula, where the Blessed Lord appeared before

him and accepted the roses at his hands. And see, the rose-trees in Francis's garden are without thorns ever since. The Signora will accept a leaf for remembrance? Ecco! the stains of Francis's blood are on the leaves still. But it seemed to me rather an allegory of life itself, which all who run may read.

Then I am conducted to the sacristy and thence into the big church once more. Meantime an evening "Office" has begun in the little church. Myriad altar-lights illumine it, people are kneeling within and without its walls. Standing close to its threshold to watch the scene, I am offered a chair to kneel upon, relinquished with a gesture of exquisite courtesy by a white-haired worshipper, whose feet have covered many a mile of life's roadway and cannot be far now from the last halting-place of all. I decline the proffered chair gratefully, and resume my way along the nave of the big church. The echo of the wailing, monotonous, sing-song of the priest's voice pursues me till the great door has opened and closed on me once more, and I am outside again in the sunshine, looking up to where Assisi itself rears its ancient walls (or what remains of them) to the blue heaven above.

No, I will not be driven up the hill, as a most smiling person in charge of a small open carriage, generously suggests. *Grazia*, but I prefer to walk through the fresh fields and by the hilly path that winds like a narrow white ribbon, up, and up, and up, until it loses itself in the steep streets of this lofty city. And so I leave the smiling person to shrug his thin, expressive shoulders, when my back is turned, over the countless vagaries of those strange beings, the "mad Inglesi"; and climb steadily until I reach the lowest tier, so to speak, of this city in the clouds. Yet still, streets rise above me, steeper, narrower, higher. Panting over stony pavements and rough hewn steps, I begin to wonder whether I shall ever set foot within its walls at all, for it seems to me that the nearer one approaches Assisi the farther apparently does it recede; but just as I am reflecting thus, I find myself at last in the midst of it. Here I stand in the Piazza, the centre of Assisi, the ancient square, re-named Vittorio-Emanuele, and here is the portico of the erstwhile temple of Minerva, now of course the Church of Santa Maria della Minerva, and here at the south angle the Chiesa Nuova, built on the site of the house in which "Francis" was born. And over this rudely paved square Francis roved in his light-hearted youth with his companions of the gay "Corti," and on some such exquisite evenings as this, trolled in the mellow tenor—that by-and-by was to melt all hearts—merry songs of Provence, in the soft Provençal tongue that was the heritage of his birth.

A crab-like progress brings me presently into another piazza, San Rufino this, so called because the Duomo San Rufino is here; a twelfth-century cathedral, the latter. The façade of it is fine, with its three rose windows, and within, Giovanni da San Severino's choir-stalls are worth looking at. Next, a passing glance at the Church of

Santa Chiara, she who was Francis's friend, and the foundress of the Poor Clares; then more steep streets, more gardens of olives and terraces of vines, and finally the monastery itself, San Francesco, with its three churches built one over the other, its priceless Giotto's, its founder's sepulchre, and—oh! age of utility—my hotel! For the best hotel Assisi boasts, the Subasio, is lodged in Francis's monastery; and presently I will dine in Francis's refectory, ye gods! at *table d'hôte*. But first to the church, or rather the three churches, and so along the cloister, where the sunshine lies in chequered beams under the cool arches. An old priest in a soutane no longer black, but faded green from age, is sitting half asleep on the stone bench in the corner. His eyes scarcely unclose to glance at me, and no gleam of interest lightens them. He knows me only too well. He does not need even the Red Badge of Baedeker under my arm to tell him who and what I am. To me and to my fellows he is wholly indifferent. Perhaps indifferent to most things as well. He looks worn and wearied, and so only the more in harmony with his surroundings. For the glory of San Francesco has departed, and it stands like its companions throughout the land, a forsaken house, shabby, deserted, at best a playground for the tourist, or a source of profit to the Sindaco. My old priest perhaps thinks of this, but outwardly his whole figure betrays listlessness, from the crown of his shabby zucchetto to the soles of his flat, patched shoes, on which the broad buckles are so rusty that even the sun rays striking across them fail to draw a sparkle from their steel surface. I leave him undisturbed to his siesta and pass into the church, there to spend the next hour or two with St. Francis and Giotto.

Of Giotto's work at San Francesco has not the last word been said long since? All that I will say of it is, that, like the melodies of Mozart, if the spirit be not born in you which can go forth to meet the spirit of the artist, then he has no message to you.

By the time I have left that wonderful lower church, and find myself on the wide plateau again, the sunshine is mellow with the advance of evening, and level rays from the slowly sinking orb of day have bathed the valley in golden light. Later still, and the golden radiance has paled, and the shadows are lengthening, and I have dined in the wide whitewashed refectory, low-roofed and flagged, with windows commanding the valley. No carpets here, no curtains, no upholstery, no frippery, no electric light: monastic simplicity of a truth still lingers here—clean, unpretentious, austere; and the fare provided is likewise unpretentious, but honestly excellent. My companions at *table d'hôte* are few in number. At my table only a couple of English travellers, an Austrian, a Neapolitan. At a modest little table inside the door, two wayfarers of the district, farmers I gather—lean, broad, brown-faced men, with soft smiling eyes—are refreshing themselves with a flask of vino, and some very strong cheese, dear to the Italian palate. But why, oh why does the landlord's daughter think it incumbent upon

her to enliven the meal by playing Chopin's waltzes on the indifferent piano in the adjoining *salle-de-lecture*? Chopin here! That music of human passion and human desire in this pure, passionless shrine! No, I do not want Chopin here, nor still less do I want to be amused by the books of English steel engravings, in the Salon upstairs, to which mine host delightedly conducts me after dinner. Steel engravings of the forties and fifties, horrible things, preserved in big volumes of red and gold morocco, the richness of their binding only equalled by the poverty of their contents. I escape at last to my own room. My room which I feel sure was once a cell, and is still but little more. Outside its windows a little iron balcony rises above the untidy Italian garden. A veritable eyrie is this balcony! Leaning on the slight iron balustrade I can see for miles over the valley, in a semicircular sweep. The summer like day has given place to a summer-like night. The splendours of the sunset still irradiate the sky, but they are fading quickly, and the shadows are creeping, creeping, now over the rich fields of the plain, now to the massed foliage of olive and fir, till they reach the purple crest of the far Apennines. In the western sky a flush of pale saffron tracks the pathway of the departed sun. The tinkle of a mule bell floats up from the plain. Through the violet twilight the thin winding road gleams whitely, and the misty light of the little lamp in front of the wayside shrine in the wall below burns clearer and brighter. The figures of a few pedestrians form living silhouettes against the luminous sky. Each, passing the shrine, kneels for a moment before it, with bowed head. It is hard to realise that in this valley of peace there is a noisy bustling train ready to carry us back to the noisy bustling world to which we belong. Yet not so very far away from where I stand lies the great city of the Past. The city of fallen empire, of lost supremacy, of dead civilisations. But all the subtle fascination of Rome fails to touch one here, for here is a lovelier dynasty than that of Emperor or Pope, here is a constraining spirit far removed from all such, as far indeed as the serene repose of the country-side and the purity of the violet night are removed from the tireless uproar, and the evil squalor, of the world's great cities.

And that is the charm of Assisi.

ELLA MACMAHON.

MY LADYE'S BOWER

I

THE sun streamed hotly through the uncurtained windows of the lofty room; the lawyer ceased reading, and, pushing his papers aside, looked into the face of the man who stood grave and thoughtful beside him. There was neither surprise nor satisfaction in that face, though the owner thereof had just heard the words read that from a poor man transformed him into a rich one. He was not more than thirty; but his face bore traces and lines of care that might be looked for in vain on many a man's face ten years his senior. This thought came into the lawyer's mind as he looked at him, and the young man suddenly caught the glance, and, with the quick intuition of a sensitive nature, read its meaning. He flushed a little.

"You are thinking that I do not look much like a man who has quite unexpectedly succeeded to a large fortune?" he said.

His companion smiled apologetically.

"Something of the kind was in my mind," he said; "for you cannot reasonably be supposed to mourn the death of a relative whom you have never seen, and who has never, if I am rightly informed, shown any sign of remembering your existence, nor——" after a pause, "that of your mother, his only daughter."

"True," replied John Burnett thoughtfully; "and I was just thinking what a very different thing life would have been for both of us, if he had helped us a little a few years ago."

"You must do your best to enjoy the life now before you," said the lawyer kindly; "you have a handsome fortune, and will find many friends in the place, some of whom, like myself, remember your mother when she was a pretty young woman; to be sure I was only a lad of twelve when she ran away with Jack Burnett, but I had always been her little sweetheart. Besides, there are your cousins—but perhaps you do not know that you have relatives living not far from here?"

"Relatives?" interrogated John Burnett.

"Cousins, several degrees removed, it is true," replied Mr. Vawdrey; "they came here some two or three years after your mother's marriage. The rector of the next village, about five miles away, is your far-away cousin, and he has six daughters—very nice girls too," continued the bachelor lawyer appreciatively. "The rector is a remarkably agreeable good fellow. The old Squire quarrelled with him; that was a matter of course—he quarrelled with everybody."

"I should like to know them by-and-by," said his hearer musingly,

speaking more to himself than to his companion; "it would be nice for Margaret to find some friends when she comes."

The lawyer's eye caught his with a question in it.

"I am speaking of Miss Margaret Torr, the lady whom I am about to marry," said John simply.

"Then there goes Chryssy Forrest's chance," said Mr. Vawdrey to himself regretfully, then aloud—"We shall all be glad to have a lady at the head of affairs here. Would you like to go over the house now, Mr. Burnett?"

"Very much; and would you mind calling me by my first name?" said the young man, a little awkwardly. "You knew my father and mother when they were young people; and I have so often heard your name, or rather that of your father, I suppose, that you seem like an old friend already."

"And so I am, and so I hope always to be!" exclaimed the lawyer, moved out of his usual calm manner, and seizing the half-offered hand in a warm grasp. "Yes; my father was the old Squire's lawyer, and was about the least astonished of anybody when your mother ran away with poor Jack Burnett—small blame to her for it!" and crossing the room to ring the bell the lawyer said to himself, "Poverty and trouble have not choked the fine feeling out of the young fellow, I am glad to find."

"Pierce," said Mr. Vawdrey to the grey-headed servant who appeared to show his new master over the house, "couldn't you have some curtains put up here, or the shutters closed, or something? The glare is really dreadful!"

"It's the same in every room upstairs and down, on this side of the house, sir," answered Pierce. "My late master would not have a curtain or blind put to any room that he used. You see, sir, how he has had all the old-fashioned windows taken away from these rooms and these very large ones put in their place."

And, indeed, the room in which they had been sitting to read the will of the old Squire was on one side nearly all window, and the adjoining rooms were in the same condition, the August sun pouring in its unchecked rays and lighting up every nook and cranny of the room.

"It seems a great pity to have patched these modern windows upon this beautiful old house," said John Burnett.

"It was the Squire's whim," replied Mr. Vawdrey, as they passed together down the corridors, Pierce going on before, opening doors and shutters. "He lived entirely in this part of the house."

They crossed the wide hall and entered the other part of the old mansion.

"We always call this the *old* hall, sir," said Pierce; "not that it is really any older than that which we have just left, but this part has not been altered at all."

Here the rooms lay to the right and left, facing the front and back

of the house, and were separated by a wide and dark corridor having doors on each side. At the end of this corridor was a winding staircase, lighted dimly from above, and leading up to the roof. As they came down the corridor John Burnett thought he saw indistinctly the figure of an elderly man in an antiquated, wide-skirted coat laboriously ascending the staircase. He was about to ask his companion a question concerning the strange figure, but at that moment Pierce unlocked a door to their left and admitted them into a large, lofty room. It had once been used as a drawing-room; the slim chairs and graceful couches were covered with rich tapestry; the ornaments were costly and in exquisite taste; and the view from the long, narrow windows, when Pierce unclosed the shutters, was of great beauty.

"It has all been kept in perfect order," said the man, in answer to John's admiring remark; "for though my late master disliked this part of the house exceedingly, he gave strict orders that fires should be lighted regularly, and every care taken of the books and furniture."

"Books?" asked his hearer, looking round.

"There is a very fine library in the next room, sir," answered Pierce.

"An invaluable collection, I believe," put in Mr. Vawdrey. "My father frequently lamented the Squire's solitary ways and long absences from the place, during which books, like everything else, were all under lock and key. The Squire only came here to live about fifteen or twenty years ago—twenty, was it not, Pierce?"

"Twenty-five, sir; just before his long illness," replied Pierce.

"Illness?" interrogated John Burnett.

"A very serious illness. But I do not know the particulars; it began with a kind of fit, I think," said the lawyer.

While speaking, they entered the next room; it was lined with books from floor to ceiling. They represented the collection of several generations; nothing of modern thought was there, but rare editions in quaint and curious bindings, all carefully guarded behind the diamond-paned doors. Above all things John Burnett was a reading man; he looked round at the closely-lined shelves with keen appreciation, and marvelled at the feeling that made his grandfather prefer the glare of the great bare rooms they had just left to this, the ideal refuge for a solitary man.

"How Margaret will love these quaint old rooms!" said he to himself, and turning he saw Mr. Vawdrey standing before a doorway in the corner near the window.

"Look at this doorway," said he; "is it not a work of art?"

It was indeed. The doorway was very deep; the door at the top of two wide shallow steps was elaborately carved with wreaths and trailing blossoms, while above the arch rich festoons and garlands of flowers were twined, long tendrils of honeysuckle and convolvulus hanging down the sides. The carving was exquisitely delicate and beautiful, and immediately over the doorway a scroll, twisted ingeniously in

and out of the clustering blossoms, bore the legend, "My Lady's Bower."

"Have you noticed the skull?" asked Mr. Vawdrey. "In my opinion it spoils the entire effect." For right above the rich cluster of blooms through which the scroll was twisted, grim and ghastly, was a human skull. The empty eye-sockets looked down on the two standing below, and a sun-ray striking across the yellow teeth gave to the fleshless jaws the likeness of an evil grin.

"That is a hideous thing to put over a lady's bower," said the young man, with a gesture of repulsion; "and it does not look like part of the original design either," he continued, stepping out into the room, and looking up at the arch which lay partly in the shadow of the ceiling. "If you look closely you will see that it covers a part of the beautiful wreath below it."

"That may have been done purposely," said his companion, eyeing the gloomy object critically; "intended as a sort of reminder that 'All that's bright must fade'—copy-book morality, you know. Our forefathers seem to have been fond of that kind of thing; a sort of equivalent for the Egyptian skeleton at the feast."

"I should, nevertheless, like to have the thing removed," replied John, looking at it with great disfavour. "Later on I will see if it cannot be done."

Meanwhile Pierce had opened the door, and was busily unclosing shutters and withdrawing blinds in the next room; and the two men entered, the new master of the house gradually awakening to a sense of pleasure in the beauty of his surroundings; not, however, for his own sake, but for hers whose beloved presence should soon fill every room in the old house with a new and added grace.

A large, long room, with three windows at one end; windows and walls draped with ample hangings of silk that had once been white, but which had become a soft, rich yellow with age; and the rose-wreaths with which it was heavily embroidered had taken to themselves the lovely subdued tints that Time—cunning artist—alone can impart. The chimneypiece, reaching to the ceiling, was carved like the doorway with wreaths and garlands of flowers, making a frame in the centre surrounding a portrait—the portrait of a woman in the full flush of beauty and health, but beautiful with a beauty that left a strange sense of dissatisfaction in the mind of the beholder. There was too much of everything—too much scarlet in the full red lips, too deep a rose in the rounded cheek, too brilliant a light in the dark eyes, too much assertion of conscious loveliness in the haughty pose of the head. John Burnett turned from his contemplation with a shake of the head.

"Not a pleasant picture," said the lawyer, who had also been studying the portrait. "I do not envy your ancestor the felicity of owning a wife of that description."

"Do you know anything of her history?" asked John.

"Nothing but that she was the wife of Simon Lovyatt; his monu-

ment stands in the chancel of the little church here; a grim old personage in a loose gown with—incongruously enough—his hands clasped over the hilt of a drawn sword. He left no children, and the estate passed to a cousin."

"House had a narrow escape from being burnt down—eh, Pierce?" said Mr. Vawdrey; and John Burnett, turning from his contemplation of the portrait, saw the lawyer standing before a large picture placed on a tall pedestal across the distant angle of the room; both picture and frame were so blackened and scorched that it was equally impossible to say what had been the subject of the one, or the material of which the other was made.

"Well, sir," replied Pierce, "it looks like it; but I can't exactly say that I know how it happened. When my late master and myself came back from Italy twenty-five years ago, the Squire was very much taken with these rooms. He came into this property after he went abroad, and had never lived here—lived previously at Greystock, a mile nearer Hamerton, sir," turning explanatorily to John. "There was a bust on that pedestal then, but it was all blackened and charred like the picture is now; and you see for yourself, sir, the hangings are just tinder." And they were; for the silken draperies for a space of about a yard on either side of the angle hung in long strips, burnt black and in tatters.

"My master had bought a Holy Family by some great painter in Italy," continued Pierce, "and I helped him myself to put it across the corner a day or two after he came here—that's it," indicating the charred canvas, "though you wouldn't think it. He was going to have the hangings restored, and in fact had a good many plans to improve the place; but it was only about a day or so after that I found him in a sort of fit at the bottom of those steps," nodding towards the steps leading down into the library, "and he was never the same man again."

"And how did the picture get into this condition?" asked John Burnett.

"I can't say, I'm sure, sir," returned Pierce, beginning to close the shutters; "but a week or so after, when the Squire was beginning to show signs of getting better, I came in here and found it as you see."

"Strange," said John thoughtfully.

"The room is horribly close, don't you think?" said Mr. Vawdrey, who had retreated to the doorway and was passing his handkerchief over his face and neck.

"Stifling; there is thunder about, I should think," replied his companion, following him into the next room.

"It's always like that, sir," said Pierce, locking the carved door behind them. "It isn't drains either, for they've all been well looked to; it's the way the room is built, somehow."

"I noticed a small door in the corner by the window," remarked John Burnett, as they followed the man down the corridor. "Where does that lead?"

"It's a sort of little lumber-room," answered Pierce; "it's the turret you can see at the end of that side of the house."

II

WALKING together down the shady drive leading from the old hall to the lodge at the gates, John Burnett gave his companion enough information about himself for the keen lawyer to be able to form a tolerably accurate idea of what the young man's life had been. His mother, whose home had been rendered unbearable by the harshness of her father, had eloped when only eighteen with a penniless musician; there had been several children, but John, the youngest, was the only one who survived infancy. His father—good-natured, unpractical, and unlucky—died while John was in his teens; and the boy, half-educated and untrained for any profession, had managed to get a clerkship, and on his small earnings mother and son had lived until her death two years ago. Sundry attempts towards reconciliation with her father had been made by the young wife during the early years before John's birth, but these had been received in such a manner that she and her husband had tacitly agreed to allow their boy to believe that his grandfather was dead; and in that belief he had remained until the letter from Mr. Vawdrey was put into his hands, telling the astounding news that he was the sole heir to his grandfather's fortune.

The necessity for grave and earnest endeavour when but a boy in years; the painful self-denial; the anxious consideration required before the expenditure of the smallest sum; the sight of others of his own age enjoying the cheap pleasures so immeasurably out of his reach—all these, added to the constant care and companionship of his dearly-loved but often querulous invalid mother, from whom he inherited a highly-strung, nervous temperament, had made John Burnett taciturn and self-contained, inclined to take a gloomy view of life in general, and to shrink from the society of his fellows. His engagement, when he was twenty-four and Margaret Torr eighteen, seemed only to add fresh anxieties at first to his life; marriage was such a far-away possibility, and the future so uncertain, that he felt almost guilty of cruelty in asking the young girl to link her future to his. But Margaret was bright and hopeful, and by degrees her gay spirits proved contagious, and John found himself looking forward to the close of his day's work with an eagerness unknown to him before; for the young girl—her day's teaching over—came and cheered the hours of languor and ennui of the invalid mother, and her young presence brought a sense of life and brightness into the lives of the two, that made them wonder how they had existed so long without her.

But years had gone by, and marriage was as far off as ever; it was an impossibility to marry while the mother lived; and then the relative with whom the orphan Margaret made her home formed new ties, and

the girl was no longer wanted in the household, and the poor trifle that she made by daily teaching was too little even for her simple needs; so with many tears in secret, and a bright face to John—which, however, did not deceive him—Margaret went away to the north to teach in a school, and for a long time the days on which her letters came were the only bright ones in her lover's calendar. Then the mother died; and now by slow and painful degrees the young man had at last gathered together a tiny sum, each sovereign of which represented a sharp denial of something needed to make life endurable; and then, when at last he was able to ask Margaret to say good-bye to her life of monotony and drudgery, the old Squire died, and the future stretched itself before them clad in ease and comfort.

All this and a good deal more the kind-hearted lawyer gathered as he and the heir to the Squire's fortune walked through the park in the soft gathering twilight of the summer night. For though the young man was slow to talk about himself, the lawyer had the rich gift of sympathy, and to the silent anxious man the outpouring of his life's story was a relief. So they strolled down the wide avenue, where in the gloom of the old trees darkness already reigned, and John drank into his thirsty, city-accustomed lungs the soft balmy breath of the night, and was soothed into calm.

Out of the shadows among the trees to his right gleamed a something white. "What is that?" he asked.

The lawyer answered by turning aside and passing through the trees out into the open lawn. It was a statue standing on a pedestal of granite, a figure of Justice brandishing a drawn sword—a stiff and ungraceful figure, doing no credit to the sculptor who evolved it from the marble, and deeply cut into the granite of the pedestal was the word "JUSTITIA."

"My ancestor's favourite virtue was evidently Justice," remarked John.

"He was a grim old fellow, I imagine," said his companion. "He looks it in his effigy in the church yonder. The said effigy being an equally hideous work of art; the old fellow, however, could have been no mean artist himself, for all that exquisite carving that we saw just now was his work, I believe."

They turned towards the avenue, and as they reached its shade, John looked back and saw standing by the granite pedestal the antiquated figure that an hour or two ago he had seen climbing the staircase to the roof; he touched Mr. Vawdrey's arm.

"Who is that?" he asked hurriedly; "there by the statue yonder?"

The lawyer turned quickly. The space by the pedestal was empty. John Burnett gazed in amazement.

"There *was* some one there," said he emphatically, "and it is the second time that I have seen the man."

"Describe him," said his companion briefly.

John did so; the lawyer shook his head.

"There is no one answering the description about the place," he said; "the gathering shadows must have misled you."

"But the man whom I saw going up the staircase?" expostulated John.

"One of the servants, most likely," replied his friend, "that staircase is very dimly lighted." "Overwrought nerves," he added to himself; "young fellow gone through too much excitement to-day." Then aloud, "You mean to stay at the inn, then, for the two or three days you remain here?"

"Yes," answered John, "and then I shall come back to the Hall and have it got ready for our wedding," with a slight increase of colour in his pale face; "we have arranged to be married just before Christmas." He glanced back in the direction of the statue. "Very odd," he said, "but I suppose it was the uncertain light, as you say."

Riding home a couple of hours later with the big yellow moon flooding the world with light, Mr. Vawdrey suddenly brought his horse to a standstill, as a white figure that had been perched on the gate leading to Hamerton Rectory precipitated itself into the road, and came flying towards him.

"Mr. Vawdrey! Mr. Vawdrey! where *have* you been? I have been waiting hours for you."

"My dear Chryssy," said the lawyer, dismounting, and leading his horse while the girl walked beside him, "why in the name of all that's sensible, didn't you go and sit with Bessie?"

"I couldn't get away," said she, a tall slim girl of twenty, looking up into his face with eyes that were deep and dark in the shadow of her battered straw hat. "It's a parish tea-meeting to-morrow, so mother isn't well, and has gone to bed for a day or two; she always is ill, you know, somehow, before parish teas." They both laughed.

"Well," continued she, as they paced along side by side, the horse following like a dog, "about the heir? I want to know all about him. Is he young? Is he good-looking? Is he going to live at the Hall? Shall we be good friends, do you think?"

"He *is* young. He *is* good-looking. He *is* going to live at the Hall. If you are not good friends it will be your own fault, for he is a thoroughly good fellow," replied her companion, laughing.

Chryssy Forrest took off her hat and smoothed back a mass of untidy red hair. "It's a relief," said she, with a sigh; "I was afraid he might be either a dandy or a prig."

"He is neither," said Mr. Vawdrey decisively, "and I already like him extremely."

They walked on in that delightful silence only possible between intimate friends, under trees where the shadows lay thickly, out into patches of moonlight, the profound stillness of the night only broken by the sound of their footsteps, until with a sigh Chryssy turned.

"I must go back," she said; "the others are all dying to know what our new cousin is like; good-night." She held out her hand.

"I will walk back to the gate with you," said her companion; "come, Dinah," and the three went back together.

"There is one disappointing fact about the new-comer," said Mr. Vawdrey, as the Rectory rose dimly before them, a black pile lighted here and there with twinkling candle gleams; "he is engaged to be married."

"Is he?" said the girl; "that's rather nice, I think. Why do you call it a disappointment?"

"Because," said the lawyer, looking down into the face uplifted to his, "I intended him for you, Chryssy; it would have been the very thing for you."

"It's extremely kind of you, I am sure, Mr. Vawdrey"—Chryssy Forrest's face was scarlet—"very kind," struggling hard to be composed and dignified. Then passionately, "I should just like to know how you dare, yes, how you DARE go about the country offering me to people! I hate the new man, I hate everybody. No! I won't shake hands; I hate everybody, I tell you, and I hate—*hate*—HATE you most of all!" Whisk! Bang! The gate swung to with a clang that startled Dinah out of a dream of oats and stable, and left Mr. Vawdrey staring in blank amazement in the empty road.

"I really don't know what is the matter with Chryssy Forrest."

Miss Bessie Vawdrey looked up inquiringly.

"She flew into a wild passion last night all about nothing," continued her brother, "abused me roundly, and refused to say good-night."

They were at breakfast; Miss Bessie, her brother's senior by fifteen years, poured herself out another cup of tea and glanced shrewdly at him over her spectacles.

"What did you say to the child?" she asked, after a pause.

"Say! I merely said I was disappointed at finding that Mr. Burnett was engaged to be married, as I had intended him for her; nothing but that," said the lawyer, with some vexation.

"Nothing but that!" echoed his sister, folding up her serviette and rising from the table, "nothing but that! well, well, men are sad fools, even the wisest of them," and therewith Miss Bessie departed, leaving her brother in silent disgust.

III

IT was a new sensation to John Burnett to find himself the centre of a family group like that of the Forrests; the rector, a genial cheery man, who would have made a good farmer and consequently made a somewhat indifferent parish priest; Mrs. Forrest, a bundle of shawls and sentiment, a chronic invalid when at home, thereby escaping the innumerable obnoxious duties of a country clergyman's wife, but capable of astounding feats of endurance when Hamerton was only a

distant memory ; six girls blithe and merry, from Chryssy, who managed the household, and did her mother's duties with brave cheerfulness, down to the twins, aged ten, who were supposed to receive a more or less spasmodic education from their father and sisters, but who spent most of their time in following their own sweet will, and were in consequence seldom presentable to the eye of a stranger. They fraternised, however, immediately with John, patronising him exceedingly after they discovered his lamentable ignorance of all things pertaining to bird, beast, and fish, and inviting themselves serenely as companions in his walks, turning up continually in a more or less ragged condition at the Hall, where bricklayers and carpenters were already at work.

The part of the house that had been occupied by the old Squire was being restored as much as possible to its original condition ; the huge windows were being removed and their places supplied by long narrow deep-seated ones, as in the other half of the mansion. John, still living at the village inn, and gradually becoming accustomed to the extreme deference with which he was treated by everybody—a deference which at first he had half resented as savouring of mockery, wrote long descriptions of everything daily to Margaret, who was unable as yet to leave her work and see things for herself. Mrs. Forrest—no village function closely impending—became suddenly strong enough to visit the Hall, ostensibly to inspect the condition of the linen presses, but really to sit in a comfortable chair in the drawing-room, while Chryssy made out lists and held long consultations with the old housekeeper whom she had known all her life.

The so-called "Old" Hall was to be left untouched with the exception of the "Ladye's Bower," and, the work of the other part of the house being well in progress towards completion, one morning John Burnett made his way thither intending to thoroughly inspect the rooms and discover what they needed.

He passed through the pretty drawing-room with its quaint furniture into the library—these three were without doubt the prettiest rooms in the house ; the sunshine of a showery September morning glinted in, bringing out gleams of gold from the backs of the serried rows of books behind the glass doors of the bookcases. An air of comfort reigned supreme. John looked round with satisfaction. As he did so his eye fell upon the grinning skull among the leaves and blossoms of the garland over the doorway ; the fitful gleams of sunshine seemed to play about the grim jaws and in the hollow eye-sockets. John looked away in impatient disgust. "The very first thing the workmen shall do in this part of the house," said he to himself, "shall be to pull down that hideous thing."

As he said it he opened the door of the Ladye's Bower. Right opposite was the little door of the turret chamber ; it stood widely open, and as John paused on the threshold he saw with amazement a figure—the figure he had seen twice before—disappearing through a doorway opposite, which evidently opened into the garden, for he could

see the great rhododendron bushes with the sun shining on their wet leaves.

He sprang across the room and into the turret chamber; a strange sickness came over him, making everything reel around him for an instant, for the room, dimly lighted by narrow lancet-shaped windows from above, was destitute of any door but the one by which he had just entered. It had been used as a lumber-room evidently for a long time; huge pieces of faded and ragged tapestry hung irregularly from the walls, a carpenter's bench stood across the very spot where an instant before had been an open door, and under it were heaps of half-finished carvings in wood, scarcely distinguishable from the dust that covered them. They had been carefully packed together, probably in the early days of the old Squire, but it was many years since any hand had touched them, and spiders and wood-worms had long reigned supreme and undisturbed.

With a dizzy feeling and a strange dimness stealing over his eyes, John Burnett staggered back into the Lady's Bower and sank down into one of the deep window-seats. It was several minutes before he recovered himself. "I must have been walking in my sleep," at last he said, with a laugh at his own folly. Just then Pierce's voice fell on his ear, the man was passing by the open window in conversation with one of the workmen. His master called to him: "Come round here, Pierce," said he, "I want to ask you something;" and Pierce appearing—

"Was there ever a door here?" asked John, indicating the spot behind the bench, as they stood together in the turret chamber.

"I believe so, sir," replied the man; "there is the trace of one in the brickwork outside, but it was walled up many years ago; there has never been one in my time."

They turned back into the Bower, John glanced towards the charred and burnt picture. "Let us take that thing away," said he, "it is a positive eyesore."

They lifted it from the pedestal with some difficulty, the burnt frame crumbling into fragments around them, then John looked round for something to replace it on the pedestal.

"Fetch me a good-sized pot of flowers, Pierce," said he; and the man returning with a huge pot of tropical lilies, his master placed them on the pedestal and surveyed them with a feeling of satisfaction.

"Send a man to remove that burnt picture," he said to Pierce, and they left the room together.

IV

MR. Vawdrey and his sister were at breakfast two days after, Miss Bessie with a pile of letters beside her, from which she occasionally read extracts, Mr. Vawdrey attending to the wants of his old terrier "Rajah," when a figure passed the window, and in a few minutes John Burnett was announced.

"Well," exclaimed Miss Bessie cordially, the young man being a great favourite with her, "this *is* an unexpected pleasure! sit down here and have some breakfast. Oh yes, of course you have had breakfast at some unearthly hour this morning, but you must be ready for another. Fresh toast, Jenkins, and another cup," and John found himself installed at the table beside his hostess, and accepting various good things almost before he had time for expostulation.

"What is the matter?" asked the lawyer, when at last a pause in Miss Bessie's hospitable suggestions gave him a chance to speak.

"Oh, you have discovered then that there *is* something the matter?" responded his guest, astonished.

"Why, man, you look worried out of your life nearly," returned Mr. Vawdrey, whose keen eyes had been taking notes during Miss Bessie's flow of conversation. "Anything wrong at the Hall?"

"Yes," returned John, "something radically wrong; but what it is, I want you to help me to discover."

"Tell us about it," returned his host, helping himself to another egg.

"The fact is," said John Burnett nervously, "it seems altogether such a queer thing, that I begin to think—don't laugh, Miss Bessie—that there is something uncanny about it. Well, you know the room called 'The Lady's Bower,' and the burnt picture on the pedestal?" His hearers nodded. "The other day I had that picture removed, and in its stead I placed on the pedestal a big pot of lilies. Yesterday afternoon a man came from London to inspect the condition of those silk hangings, and take away a piece as pattern in order to have the burnt parts renewed: judge my astonishment when on going into the room I found the flower-pot blackened and cracked and burnt, and the lilies dead and shrivelled, as if they had been thrust into the fire." His audience listened in amazement. "I assure you," he went on, with a little nervous laugh, "I began to think I must be going mad, and called in Pierce, who had seen me place the flowers on the pedestal, and was as astonished as I was and am myself."

Mr. Vawdrey sat silent for a few minutes. "There must be some trickery going on," said he. "Are any of the servants leaving?"

"Not one," replied John Burnett; "they are all old and faithful servants, and perfectly trustworthy, I am convinced."

"Did you walk here?" asked the host, after a pause.

"Yes," replied John; "the affair bothered me so, that I thought the walk might do me good—clear away the cobwebs you know," turning with a laugh to Miss Bessie.

That lady looked grave, however.

"Whatever the mystery may be," said she with decision, "it should be cleared up before Miss Torr comes; we women are nervous creatures"—Miss Bessie had nerves of iron—"and mystery and trickery of any kind would be a poor welcome to a happy young bride."

John looked at the dear old lady with a grateful flush on the face that had already lost a good deal of its city pallor.

"I am driving to the village presently," said Mr. Vawdrey, "and we can talk it over as I go. I'll tell you all about it when I come back, Bessie; don't die of curiosity in my absence," and, amidst Miss Bessie's laughingly indignant disclaimers, in a short time they drove off in the lawyer's high dog-cart.

"What do you suggest being done?" asked John, as they went swiftly along through the shady roads in the fresh morning air.

"Done!" echoed the lawyer, rousing himself from a contemplation of the chimneys of Hamerton Rectory; "we will first of all thoroughly examine the room, and see if there is any rational reason—there *must* be one, of course, if we can only find it—for this bothering affair. Well, that being done and no clue to the matter being found, we must set a watch. I suppose you cautioned Pierce about holding his tongue, eh?"

"Strictly," replied his companion; "and he is as anxious for an explanation as I am myself."

They stopped at the inn, and walked together to the Hall, whose creeper-overgrown front was now beautiful in the red and crimson glories of early autumn tints. Pierce met them in the corridor leading to the disused rooms, and the three made a searching examination of every part of the Lady's Bower. Strangely enough the fire—of whatever nature it was—had evidently always strictly confined itself to the one corner of the room from which the tattered hangings had been removed, revealing the scorched and blackened wall; but vainly they searched—no clue to the mystery could be found. They removed the disfigured vase, replacing it with one filled with fresh blossoms, and, dismissing Pierce, sat down in a window-seat and looked at each other blankly.

"A reason there *must* be, as I said before," reiterated the lawyer doggedly, "and that reason I mean to find. What's the matter, Burnett?"

"I don't quite know," answered the young man, white to the lips; "there seems to be no air in the room." Mr. Vawdrey sprang upon the cushioned seat and tried to draw the top part of the window down; it resisted his efforts. "Strange," said he, getting down; "you are right, the room feels stifling. I'll open the other window. Good heavens! Burnett! What is it?" for John Burnett had risen and clutched him by the arm.

"There! there! Don't you see?" he gasped, the white froth on his lips, and pointing with a hand that shook like a leaf in the wind. Turning, the lawyer saw—what?

Down from the ceiling of the room it came, a dark lurid cloud; the blessed daylight retreated before it, the air became hot and stifling, the huge jar cracked and fell in fragments, and the fair clusters of blossoms shrivelled as it descended upon them. The feeling of an evil presence filled the room; then—while the two men, with clenched

hands, stood in a horror too great for words—the thing wavered to and fro, and sparks of dull light leapt up and down in the darkness, until from the midst looked out a face. Nothing that painter has ever imaged or poet described, could equal the incarnate evil of that face; livid, and yet lit up with ghastly light, as though glowing with internal fires, slowly it shaped itself in the darkness into the face of a woman; a hideous similitude of the woman's face that glowed in youth and beauty amid the sculptured buds and blossoms over the mantelpiece; and now, while the two men, speechless with horror, their faces livid in the darkness, gazed, unable to move from the spot, it disengaged itself from the lurid light around it and came quickly towards them, the hot blast of its presence striking fiercely on them as it advanced.

"Burnett, for Heaven's sake rouse yourself," cried Mr. Vawdrey, his very terror giving him strength as he felt his companion stagger against him; even as he spoke, John Burnett swayed heavily forward and fell at his feet.

"Help! help!" shouted the lawyer, his courage returning as the thing paused for a moment. The door opened and the daylight rushed in as Pierce entered, and as Mr. Vawdrey staggered forward like a drunken man towards him, the thing vanished like a wreath of mist.

V

THERE was trouble at the Hall for long weeks; the trees clothed themselves in gold and scarlet, then all too soon cast off their regal raiment and lifted bare branches to a wintry sky; the wind howled round the twisted chimneys, and the rain beat dismally at times against the heavily curtained windows of the room wherein the young Squire lay fighting a sore battle for life, and for reason, without which life were worthless.

In the old Squire's library below might be seen the unusual signs of a woman's presence, work-baskets and the little indescribable odds and ends indispensable, apparently, to the feminine existence. For Miss Bessie, leaving her brother to his own devices, had taken up her abode here, and in the sick man's room Margaret Torr shared the watches of the hired nurses, and by her sweet serenity and calm did more than nurse or doctor towards restoring John Burnett to his old self. For, indeed, the man's nerves had been sorely shaken, and for a time his doctor almost hoped that death would step in and prevent his return as a madman to the world of the sane. But gradually, very gradually, health and reason were coming back, and at length so much stronger had he become that his watchful guardians were able to fix Christmas Eve for a festival dinner in the big dining-room below, to celebrate his recovery.

To Margaret, the sorrow and anxiety of her lover's illness had been greatly assuaged by the unlooked-for kindness of this band of

strangers, who yet were once no strangers, but warm and hearty friends; for at the first intimation of John's illness, Mrs. Forrest—wound, for once, into animation—wrote a warm and cordial letter begging Margaret to make her home with them; and the girl's gentleness and sweetness took the impulsive Forrest family by storm, and every member of it became her devoted slave, down to the twins, who devoted themselves largely to the art of cookery during John's illness, and were perpetually appearing at the Hall, dirty and dishevelled, bearing some doubtful-looking delicacy which they had prepared for the invalid; and to the consumption of these dainties—always solemnly received with perfect seriousness, and an inward shudder by Miss Bessie—the twins firmly believed John Burnett owed his recovery.

To Mr. Vawdrey the shock had been much slighter, owing probably to the superior strength of nerves kept in good order by country air and exercise. He merely waited for the time when John Burnett, thoroughly restored to health, should be able with him to undertake a search into the mystery.

Meanwhile the Lady's Bower was left to its fate; three or four shuddering maids clinging to each other visited it daily to attend to the fires which Pierce rigidly insisted upon keeping up in the deserted rooms, but, that duty performed, no one ventured near the corridor leading to the disused part of the house. In that indescribable and unaccountable manner in which such things leak out, it had somehow become known that the master and Mr. Vawdrey had "seen" something in the old rooms, and not a living soul would have ventured near them after dusk for any reward that could have been offered.

It wanted rather more than a week to Christmas Day; there had been a merry party at the Hall, for Miss Bessie and Chryssy, with Mrs. Forrest's usual passive assistance, had been busy all day arranging for Christmas treats to the villagers and gifts to old and young, to say nothing of a huge Christmas tree which was already standing in its great green tub in the hall, an object of much interest to the twins. The day had been unusually dark and gloomy, and that heavy stillness was over everything that usually foretells a storm. Mrs. Forrest and the children had been taken home by the rector in the early afternoon; Miss Bessie, who was still staying with the semi-invalid, was busy in the housekeeper's room; and in the large inner hall Mr. Vawdrey and Chryssy were busily unpacking the great boxes sent from London for the Christmas festivities.

Between the two a species of armed neutrality had reigned ever since that memorable evening when the rectory gate had been slammed in the faces of Dinah and her master. There was a change, unnoticed by those around, but very evident to themselves, from the happy familiarity of former days to an interchange of commonplace remarks when in society and silence when alone together. To do the lawyer

justice, he had again and again tried to alter this condition of things ; but Chryssy was inexorable. Bitterly did the girl resent the—as she put it to herself—willingness of her old friend to hand her over to a stranger ; and she brooded over her imaginary wrongs until they assumed more and more gigantic proportions in her mind.

Steadily the unpacking went on ; Noah's arks of fabulous dimensions, tin trumpets and drums, dolls of great weakness in the legs and staring composure of countenance were unearthed from their wrappings, until at last the clock striking reminded them of the lateness of the hour, and Mr. Vawdrey, rising from his knees, inquired :

"When are you going home, Chryssy ?"

"I don't know," answered Chryssy shortly.

"It is too late and too far for you to walk alone ; and I promised the rector to drive you back," said Mr. Vawdrey with equal brevity. "I am going in twenty minutes and should feel obliged if you could be ready by that time ; if not, I shall wait until you *are*," and he brushed the bits of straw from his coat, gave himself a shake, and went off to say "good-night" to his sister, leaving Chryssy Forrest speechless with disgust and wrath.

She was ready, however, at the appointed time, and allowed herself to be helped into the high dog-cart and have the rugs carefully tucked in round her, then Mr. Vawdrey took the reins and they started.

It was a wild night ; heavy clouds were driving across the sky, every now and then the moon shone out, only to be immediately obscured by the scurrying masses. Chryssy, in sulky silence, nestled down under her rugs, giving an occasional side glance at the grave set face of her companion, a glance of which she little knew that gentleman was fully aware. They turned into the long avenue, where the leafless branches swayed and groaned, tossing hither and thither in the fierce gusts of wind. All at once Dinah stopped with a suddenness that threw them both forward in their seats, and stood trembling in every limb. They were opposite the opening in the trees through which the statue of Justice, with its uplifted sword, glimmered white in the darkness.

"So-ho, lass, so-ho !" said Mr. Vawdrey to the trembling mare ; "what can be the matter with her ? Take the reins, Chryssy, please, while I get out and see if——"

As he spoke the moon broke brilliantly forth and revealed, standing by the pedestal of the statue, a man in a quaint and ancient dress. It was but for an instant, then a fresh gust of wind drove the black clouds across the moon, and with the returning darkness the mare suddenly broke into a wild and frantic gallop.

Down the long avenue they went, the light cart swaying to and fro, Mr. Vawdrey gripping the reins with both hands, and Chryssy clinging to the side of her seat in silent expectation of every instant finding herself flying out into the road. Once she moved as if about to jump out, but the lawyer's quick—almost agonised—exclamation, "Sit still, child !" sent her back into her seat. At length the mare, hitherto

docile and gentle as a loved and petted creature always is, became calmer, and was able to hear and understand her master's voice. He checked her by degrees into a walk, by which time they were out in the highroad and well on their way to Hamerton; then he turned and looked down at Chryssy. "I am sorry," said he courteously, "that I spoke so abruptly to you just now, but you would have been killed probably if you had jumped out."

Chryssy made an inarticulate response from the disarranged rugs in which she was endeavouring again to wrap herself.

"Let me arrange your wrappings," said Mr. Vawdrey, bringing the mare to a standstill and turning to the girl. He arranged the shawls and rugs with a deft and careful hand, Dinah standing peacefully, as though her wild escapade of a few minutes previously had never happened. As the lawyer lingered over the last folds, Chryssy looked up into his face, her blue eyes full of tears. "Forgive me," she said. "I have been so horrid; but—but—I couldn't bear to think that you were ready to give me to the first stranger who might——"

"Child," and Lyon Vawdrey's voice was unsteady, "it was of you I thought; of your life so unselfish, and a little hard in its many cares. I wanted you to have a happy home of your own."

"It could not have been a happy home," said the girl, drawing a little closer to the strong figure beside her.

"Why not?" asked her companion.

"Because I could not bring love to it," said Chryssy, half whisperingly.

"Why not?" he asked again; and for answer Chryssy Forrest looked up into his face with sweet wet eyes and trembling lips and said—

"Because all the love I have is yours already," and she buried her face in his sleeve.

A high dog-cart, on a wild night in winter, is scarcely a suitable place for love-making, some people might think; but those two people found it eminently satisfactory, and it was not until Dinah showed signs of an intention to proceed to Hamerton on her own account that the two happy people behind her remembered her existence.

What a contrast this was to that miserable starting, as they drove slowly through the quiet roads, Chryssy nestling close to the strong heart that beat only for her, encircled by the arm that held her with such sure protection.

"And you really—really love an old fellow whose hair is grey, and who is old enough to be your father?" asked Lyon Vawdrey tenderly.

"Really and truly," laughed Chryssy, beginning to grow mischievous in the intoxication of her new happiness; "though you *did* design me, like Dickens's young woman, for 'Another.'"

The rectory gate showed white in the glints of moonlight; the lawyer sprang down and lifted the girl from the cart.

"Such a muffled little bundle," said he, drawing her closely to his side; "now run in, my darling, and tell the rector I am coming to-morrow to ask for his greatest treasure."

And it was not until Dinah stood before his own gates that Mr. Vawdrey remembered the figure he had seen standing by the statue.

VI

THROUGH the night the storm raged furiously; young trees were uprooted and great branches torn from the old oaks around the Hall. In the height of it all the huge stalk of twisted chimneys, immediately over the disused part of the house, fell with a mighty crash, and the morning broke bright and clear upon a scene of considerable devastation.

Mr. Vawdrey was at breakfast when a mounted messenger came from the Hall with a note, which ran thus:—

"DEAR VAWDREY,—Can you come over in the course of the morning? A rather curious discovery has been made, and I am waiting for your presence before investigating into it.—Yours faithfully,

"JOHN BURNETT."

Sending a note to Chryssy to explain his non-appearance at the Rectory, as soon as possible Mr. Vawdrey drove over to the Hall.

Pierce was waiting on the steps. "Will you please come up to the roof, sir," said he; "my master is there expecting you."

On the roof several workmen were gathered round a large opening, which had evidently been made by the fall of the heavy chimney-stalk, and which was partially covered with boards. John Burnett came from the midst of the group in some excitement. "I am glad you have come, Vawdrey," said he. "We have discovered a secret room in the roof."

The broken bricks and stone-work had been removed, and there, sure enough, below their feet was a small room in whose centre stood some dark object. One of the men produced a lantern, and taking it John Burnett swung himself down into the little chamber.

It was a small room, just high enough to allow the two men to stand upright in it. No trace of furniture was there, except in the centre a large chest of elaborately carved oak, blackened by age and thickly covered with dust. On its top stood a small wooden box. John lifted it. The lid was unfastened and came off in his hand; the hinges rusted away with age. Inside lay a thick book bound in leather, and clasped with clumsy brass clasps.

"It is manuscript," said Mr. Vawdrey, gingerly lifting one of the old covers. The men above, peeping down, uttered murmurs of disappointment; even Pierce had forgotten his usual dignity, and was leaning over the aperture looking in with the rest.

"Perhaps the big box is full o' gold," suggested one of the onlookers in an awed whisper.

A sympathetic gasp of excitement ran through the group.

"Move away some of the planks," said John Burnett, and the men doing so a ray of wintry sunshine darted into the chamber, and flickered about the dusty chest. Mr. Vawdrey placed his hands on the lid: it was merely held in place by its own weight, which was very great. The two men, one on either side, raised it high, and for one brief instant looked down on the dead face of Simon Lovyatt's wife; she lay there robed in costly stuffs, in which threads of gold still gleamed; jewels were on her neck and sparkled in the folds of her robe. For an instant only they saw her, for—sending a thrill of horror through the onlookers—a quick tremor shook the body from head to foot, and lo! a little heap of dust and glittering fragments!

VII

LONG after the old oak chest, with its pitiful relics of what had once been so beautiful, had been placed in the Lovyatt vault in the little church, John Burnett and his wife sat down to read the story contained between the covers of the old book that had lain so long in the darkness and horror of that secret room. The spring sunshine was lighting up the Lady's Bower; the turret room, with its doorway restored and now opening into a greenhouse, was gay with blossoms; and in the library, where the two were seated, the sunbeams danced on the gilded covers in the bookcase, and threw arrows of light among the garlands above the doorway, whence the hollow eyes of the skull no longer looked down. The air was full of the clang and clash of welcoming bells, for only some few hours ago Lyon Vawdrey and his young wife had come home, and great had been the demonstrations made in their honour.

Since the discovery in the roof peace had reigned in the old house; the horror that for so long had haunted the deserted rooms haunted them no longer; and the shadowy form of the old man in antique garments was no longer seen ascending the dim staircase or standing by the statue.

Many times John Burnett had desired to read the old manuscript, wherein doubtless lay the history of the curse that had hung over the home of his forefathers; but, not until with health and strength fully restored, he had settled down to the peaceful routine of life as a country squire would Margaret consent to what she felt would be a revival of memories that were better forgotten for ever. So on this pleasant evening, while his wife sat beside him and the sound of bells was borne upon the wind, John Burnett opened the old book and read as follows:—

"It had been mine intention to leave no record either in the mind

and memory of any man, neither yet in any writing of mine own of the deed that I, Simon Lovyatt, a magistrate of His Matie and Lord of this Manor of Lovyatt, did in the year of Our Lord One thousand six hundred and eighty-nine, when our lawful King James was an exile from the throne of his fathers, and Dutch William and his wife ruled in his stead. Truly I care little for these things now; but then, though my years were nigh forty, my heart was hot with anger, like that of a boy, for the King's banishment; the more because, like him, the Lovyatts have ever held the ancient faith.

"Therefore I and more of my way of thinking made many plots to bring His Matie again to his own; and many were the letters carried by Ralph, my ancient serving-man, which, an he had been caught, had cost him his head.

"Therefore he knew all my secrets and I trusted him in all things; though my wife loved him not at all, and would have had me send him from me—a thing which, by God's grace, I did not consent to do. My wife was young. It may be that this will not be read until that this house which my father built for me, his only son, be fallen into decay, and the picture of my wife now over the mantel of her Bower be faded and her beauty gone; but she was beautiful more than other women even in the eyes of those who loved her not, much more then in mine; for I had loved her from her birth, and that with a love that grew greater and stronger as the years went by; a love that even now, when her body is but dust and loathsomeness, and her memory hath faded out of the minds of men, rises up in me and struggles to be heard, ay, and *is* heard, too, spite of the wrong she did me, for which she hath received just punishment. Justice! That hath ever been my favourite virtue and the watch-word of mine house, and I have had it carved upon the tomb which hath been made for me—and a clumsy knave is the maker thereof—and have also put a figure of Justice over the well wherein—but all concerning that will be told in due course.

"My wife was scarce fifteen when we were married; she loved me then, perhaps; I do not know; this I do know that I loved her with a love that knew no shade of doubt; for methinks 'tis but a poor affection that questions and cavils and misdoubts. So I loved like a fool, blindly.

"I had ever had a pretty taste in the carving of wood, and it pleased me both before and after our marriage to make as beautiful as my poor skill allowed the rooms which my Lady most affected; therefore I carved the wreaths and garlands round her picture and about her door; after the deed whereof I am about to write was done, I put among the garlands a Death's Head in mockery as also in remembrance. But I was happy those first years at my work in the turret room, with Ralph waiting on me and my wife singing at her broidery frame. Then came the troublous times of the Duke of Monmouth's Rebellion and then the troubles that befell the King's Grace; and it may be that I was to blame, for my mind was much set

on helping in my poor way His Matie; and I left my wife sometimes for days together, with only Ralph to guard her and her waiting-women.

"So it came to pass that when, after a long journey, I came home full of joy to be under mine own roof again, Ralph came to me with face blanched and grey, and told me that which hath changed my life history for me.

"For he told me that my wife whom I trusted was faithless; nay more—that she plotted my ruin; that she—who held my honour in her hands—had betrayed me; and not that alone, but that she had taken my letters and papers—of a kind that would bring many a brave man to the gallows—and would that night give them to her lover to lay before the Dutch King's Council.

"He told not that story without peril to himself, for my wrath was high and my unbelief strong; but at length I listened quietly, and, having bound him by a great oath to silence, I set myself to know the truth of his story.

"They met at their usual trysting place, and I heard her mock my love and deride my faith, and tell her lover how she loathed me; and she gave into his hands the packet that would cost my life and that of many others, and they parted. But when he reached the spot where he had left his horse tethered he found me there before him. I had not seen him clearly before, for their meeting had been held in a place where the trees grew thickly and the shadows were deep; now I saw him plainly in the dim light of a night of the late summer. I had meant to slay him, but I changed my mind when I saw him, a stripling scarce twenty, with a face ghastly with terror at sight of my bare blade; a curled and perfumed darling scarce free from his mother's leading-strings; but I bade him deliver up the packet; and, when he hesitated with some poor show of bluster, I took him by the throat and shaking him like the cur he was I took the packet from his breast, and not that alone but a parcel of letters from my wife, by the writing of which she had doubtless solaced herself in his absence. Then I spurned him with my foot and bade him begone, and he went, nor have I seen or heard of him since. Truly 'twas a pitiful sight to see the lad shake as with palsy at the sight of half an ell of cold steel.

"I had been in my leisure carving a chest for my wife, to hold some of her garments; I went back to it now, and putting aside all thought of other matters set myself to finish it. There was wonder in Ralph's countenance as he saw me daily working at my task; there was fear, also, for he knew me better than did the woman, who, after the lapse of some days—how many I knew not, for time went by unheeded by me—began to look across the fields and down the road, and listen for the tramp of men coming to hale me to prison and a traitor's death. And at such times I smiled grimly to myself, nay, once I laughed aloud, and my laughter sounded horrible in mine own ears, and may be in hers also, for she shuddered and looked at me with something like

dread. But at last all was ready; and then I barred and locked the outer door of the turret room by which Ralph was wont to come and go, and I took away the key and bade him wait my pleasure there. He would have craved mercy for her, spite of all, but I bade him be silent; and I left him there and went into the Bower, barring that door also lest he might break forth and stay the course of justice. I had well planned the time, for a great merrymaking was going on in the village, and men and maids were there to share the junketing. My voice sounded strange to me in the nigh empty house as I called my wife to come into the room wherein she had so often sat and plotted base treachery against me, her husband.

"She came, wondering a little at the summons, then as she saw my face, shrank back a little; but I took her by the arm, saying 'I would speak with you, madam,' and shut and barred the door by which she had entered.

"She looked at me, and her breath came and went more quickly than 'twas wont as she said—

"'What great mystery is this? Is your honour rehearsing a play for the Christmas merrymaking?' 'Aye, truly, madam,' said I; 'such a play as playwright hath ere now often conceived in his mind, and acted for the instruction of his fellows; 'tis the punishment of a faithless wife.'

"She blanched a little, but being a woman of rare courage faced me boldly.

"'Tis a somewhat stale plot,' she said, with a struggle to seem indifferent.

"'Tis a plot, madam, the acting whereof will cost you your life,' I said, and I drew from my breast her letters.

"And when, after prayers which speedily changed to curses, and threats and expressions of hatred and loathing, she became silent, I took from the shelf where I had placed it ready the cup containing the poison that should end her life, and when I saw in her face that she was ready to dash it from my hand, I said—

"'Twere pity, madam, to deface so fair a corpse, yet an you refuse the draught, my dagger is ready.' Then she took the cup and drank it, and I sat down and watched her die.

"And after that I went and fetched her costliest robe, one that had been my birthday gift to her, and the jewels which I had lavished upon her, and I decked her as for a festival and laid her in the oaken chest which mine own hands had made.

"Then I released Ralph, nearly dead with fear and anguish, and together we bore her to the secret chamber in the roof, of which he and I alone know the secret.

"But on that day, I, Simon Lovyatt, suddenly became an old man; for it seemed to me as if the world were dead, as dead as she who sleeps in that hidden chamber; none spoke of the absence of their lady, for, strangely enough, the only one who had known nothing of the

shame was I, the sufferer from it; and all men believed—so Ralph told me—that she had fled with her lover. Therefore nought was said, and soon the very memory of the dead was forgotten by all save myself and Ralph.

"Now it fell out that Ralph, having seen justice done upon his mistress, from that day knew no peace. Alike were arguments and persuasion vain, for mostly he bewailed that she had been slain without priest or prayer; he did nought but wander about house and fields and grew bent and feeble. He grew surly too, and was ever looking fearfully behind as if something he dreaded were about to seize him. And one day as he and I stood by the great well near by the road that leads to the Hall, talking to a man from Hamerton who craved a hearing anent some wrong he had suffered, Ralph made a great cry, and throwing his arms wildly upward leaped into the blackness yawning at his feet.

"Twas a great grief to me, for he was a faithful knave and had served me and mine all his life; and we sought, but found not, his body, and perhaps 'twere better so, for having sought his own death, Christian burial would have been denied him; therefore I—after much time spent in vain seeking—had the well filled up, and over it I raised the granite block with its figure of Justice, and so that he might not be buried like a dumb brute, I forced a priest who came this way to say prayers for his soul, which he did with ill grace, though too fearful of me to refuse.

"Now this is a true history, and to it I, Simon Lovyatt, affix my name and seal of my forefathers bearing the legend to which I the last of my name have ever been true, 'Justitia.'"

And John Burnett closing the old book said—

"Here at last is the explanation of the mystery of the Lady's Bower."

E. CURTIS-PLIM.

VERSAILLES

VERSAILLES, glorious Versailles, pompous Versailles, as Delille in a charming poem so aptly terms it; Versailles, with its stately proportions, its unrivalled magnificence, and all its historical associations, remains to-day a grand memorial of the vanished monarchy of France, and of a Court which surpassed all others in brilliancy and splendour.

One often hears of persons with imaginative tendencies taking such intrepid flights into the realms of fancy, as to repeople places and buildings that have played an important part in history with the shades of those who were once connected with them. Let this imagination be exercised at Versailles; let the mind travel back through the mists of the past, and there will appear a crowd of personages, having so vast an amount of interest attached to them, and about whom so much has been written, so much read, that we feel, as we fancy we see them once more crossing the stage where their lives were enacted, that they hold a place in the history of the world from which the ever-rolling years cannot shake them, or obliterate their names from the book of fame. Fascinating indeed is that train of kings and queens, princes and princesses, of "grandes dames et seigneurs du temps jadis," all in the garb of an age of elegance, each one a perfect picture in itself, and each having its own character, its own story, its own interest. But among all these shades there is one that takes pre-eminence above the others, and stands forth to encounter us at every turn. I mean the shade of the great king to whom Versailles owes all its glory, who was the presiding genius in France for more than half a century, the *Roi Soleil*, around whom we read that planets innumerable revolved, whom poets, painters, and authors vied with each other to flatter—the shade of him who was known as the Grand Monarque.

Émile Deschamps, wandering in the deserted halls of Versailles, seems to have been deeply impressed with the sense of the proximity of these ghosts of the past, and with all the grace of poetic expression he exclaims:—

"Voilà le solennel, l'abandonné Versaille,
Qu'ose seule habiter l'ombre du grand Louis;
Des fêtes encor d'autrefois mon cœur tressaille,
Je rêve . . . et les héros de Lens et de Marsaille,
Les dames, les seigneurs, sous mes yeux éblouis,
Tous fantômes de gloire et de magnificence,
Repeuplent ce palais, solitaire cité,
Dont aucun roi vivant, dans toute sa puissance,
Ne peut remplir l'immensité."

And then there is the shade of a beautiful queen—a queen at whose shrine the worshippers have been many, whose name never ceases to inspire the most profound feelings of admiration, mingled with sorrow and grief, feelings which every new history, every fresh line written of her, stirs up and revives all anew.

"Pardon me, august shade, unhappy queen," cries Madame Campan, stretching out her hands towards the portrait of Marie Antoinette, whose memoirs she was writing. "Pardon me, thy portrait is near me whilst I am writing these words. My imagination, impressed with the remembrance of thy sorrows, every instant directs my eyes to those features which I wish to animate, and to read in them whether I am doing service to thy memory in writing this work. When I look at that noble head, which fell by the fury of the barbarians, tears fill my eyes and suspend my narration. Yes; I will speak the truth, by which thy shade can never be injured—truth must prove favourable to her whom falsehood so cruelly wronged."

And we also, although, unlike the writer of these words, we never saw her, never knew her, and although more than a hundred years separates our lives from hers, yet we also are impressed with the sorrows of Marie Antoinette, and grieve still over the most terrible of all the terrible events of the great French Revolution. There is no place more closely connected with this unfortunate queen than Versailles. Here she came, in all the freshness of her youth and beauty, as the affianced bride of the Dauphin of France. Here almost the whole of her married life was spent—a life joyous and brilliant at first, but darkened by misfortune as time went on; and from here she went forth, almost a prisoner, with the death-knell of the monarchy heralding her own. "The most poetic of all women," says Imbert de Saint Armand; "she who unites at the same time all the majesty and all the sorrows, all the triumphs and all the humiliations, all the joys and all the tears; she whose very name inspires emotion and respect."

There are several portraits of Marie Antoinette at Versailles, but the one which we think has an especial charm is that painted by Madame Vigée Lebrun. It is of three-quarter length, and represents the queen nearly facing the spectator, and holding some flowers in her hands. This picture is among the great collection of historical portraits on the second floor of the palace.

It was in 1675 that Louis XIV. commenced his great building operations at Versailles. There existed here already a small château which had been erected by Louis XIII., who had used it chiefly as a hunting residence, and to this château Louis XIV. often came, during the early part of his reign, to indulge in "the pastime of hunting." He also gave here, between the years 1662 and 1674, a series of splendid fêtes, which the records of the period speak of as "Les Fêtes de Versailles."

The ideas of Louis XIV. were far more magnificent than his father's had been, his Court and *entourage* much larger, and so it came about

that after a time he ceased to be satisfied with so modest a residence as was this château of Louis XIII., and determined to build a palace of much greater dimensions. In filial respect for his sire, however, he gave special commands to Levau, who was the architect employed, on no account to destroy the original château, but to utilise it as a part of the new one. These commands were obeyed, and the château of Louis XIII. became the central portion of the palace of Louis XIV.

To the celebrated Jules Hardouin Mansard, who, on the death of Levau in 1676, had become the king's first architect, belongs the chief credit of having planned this stupendous pile, although other men of lesser note, such as Blondel and Dorbay, had their share in the designing of portions of it. All the skilled artists and workmen of the day—the principal among them being the painters Charles Lebrun, Audran, Baptiste, Coytel, Blain de Fontenay, Delafosse, Juvenet, Mignard, and Van der Menlen; the sculptors, Coustou, Coyzevox, Vassé, and Van Cleve; the sculptors in wood, Jacques Caffieri, Taupin, and Temporiti; the founders and chasers, Claude Ballin, Dominique, and Cucci; the art locksmiths, Delobel, Lebreton, and Mangin—exercised their talents in the beautifying of the building, where some of their very finest work is to be seen. In 1682, after seven years of unceasing labour, a palace of superb grandeur and beauty stood forth, a residence worthy of the sovereign of the first monarchy in Christendom.

The gardens and park are the work of Lenotre. No site could have been less favourable for the laying out of picturesque grounds than was the land at Versailles at that time. It was entirely without natural advantages of any kind, being nothing but a treeless, waterless, bare, and arid plain, possessing absolutely nothing that would in any way lend itself to the work. "Versailles, le plus triste et le plus ingrat de tous les lieux, sans vues, sans bois, sans eau, sans terre."¹

On this account, therefore, was the labour tenfold increased. The great landscape gardener Lenotre was entrusted with the work, and right worthily did he carry out his difficult task. Trees were planted, marvellous fountains, cascades, and lakes appeared, the water to supply these being brought with immense labour from afar by means of subterranean watercourses. Statue-adorned terraces and balustrades were made, enchanting grounds and arbours sprang into existence, making altogether a *chef-d'œuvre*, in comparison of which all other gardens sink into insignificance. Alfred de Musset, in a poem entitled "Sur trois marches de marbre roses," goes so far as to maintain that since the days of the Garden of Eden the equal of them has not been known.

"Depuis qu' Adam ce cruel homme,
A perdu son fameux jardin,
Je ne crois pas que sur la terre,
Il soit un lieu d'arbres planté,
Mieux exercé, dans l'art de plaire,
Plus examiné, plus vauté,

¹ Mémoires du Duc de Saint Simon.

Plus décrit, plus lu, plus chanté,
Que l'ennuyeux parc de Versailles."

And even now, although these gardens must greatly have changed since royal feet trod the parterres, and the laughter of Arcadian shepherdesses was heard in the groves—yet even now, and more especially in the glorious days of early spring, when the trees and hedges are clothed in delicate emerald green, these far-famed gardens are still beautiful, whilst their associations invest them with a charm which few can fail to be sensible of.

The whole of Versailles was a sort of glorification of Louis XIV. He is represented everywhere in different forms, and by different emblems: now as a god, a Roman emperor, or a great conqueror; but his chief emblem was the sun, which everywhere appears, either in its own form or represented by Apollo the Sun God. Within the palace, doors, cornices, furniture, clocks—all bear the device, and in the gardens Apollo is the paramount deity.

"Tout la decoration des jardins et du Château ne formait en effet qu'une immense rébus dont le mot était toujours et partout Apollon, c'est-à-dire Louis XIV., le dieu du jour, nec pluribus impar."¹

The three most celebrated fountains are the Bassin d'Apollon, the Bassin de Latone, and the Bassin de Neptune.

The Bassin d'Apollon was designed by Lebrun, and is the most beautiful of all. In the centre is a group representing Apollo, with his chariot and horses, emerging, according to the lovely idea of the ancients, in all his glorious splendour from the ocean at the opening day, and preparing to drive across the hemisphere to give light and warmth to the earth, to carry joy and gladness to the myriads of creation, ere he sinks again at evening, his gracious task accomplished, into the waves of the golden sea.

The Bassin de Latone takes its name from the figure of Latona, standing in the centre with her two children, Apollo and Diana, and surrounded by frogs. According to the ancient fable Latona besought the aid of Jupiter against her enemies the people of Lycia, whereupon Jupiter exerting his power metamorphosed them into frogs.

At the Bassin de Neptune is seen Neptune the Sea God, with Amphitrite and Proteus.

We are told that many of the most beautiful groves have long ceased to exist; but we can still form an idea of what they were like from a collection of very curious old pictures to be found in some rooms on the ground floor of the palace. These pictures represent the gardens as they were in the time of Lenotre; and to render them still more fairylike and enchanting, the painter has introduced Cupids and various other imaginary beings, some of whom disport themselves round the splashing fountains, while others, more industrious, are busily engaged in gardeners' work.

The royal stables ("Les Grandes-Écuries"), built from Mansard's

¹ Mémoires de Charles Perrault.

designs, and capable of holding 2500 horses, and the "Petite-Écurie," also Mansard's work, for the royal equipages, are now used as barracks.

It was in 1682 that Louis XIV. finally quitted Saint Germain, and took up his abode at Versailles, which now became the seat of the Government, and the principal residence of the Court. Some idea of the magnitude and splendour of that Court may perhaps be formed, when we are told the number of persons living in the palace and its dependencies amounted to ten thousand. Here, on the 1st September 1715, Louis XIV. died, in the seventy-seventh year of his age and the seventy-second of his reign.

Versailles continued to be the headquarters of the Court under Louis XV., who effected several alterations here, abolishing some of the apartments of Louis XIV., and replacing them by smaller ones.

The art of decoration in France, a country where artistic discernment was always strongly developed, had reached in this reign a degree of perfection never surpassed. The somewhat overwhelmingly magnificent manner of adornment prevalent during the reign of Louis XIV. had given place to that most charming and delicate style, in which admirable harmonies of white and gold, and graceful arrangements of Watteau-painted panels and arabesque-encircled mirrors, formed the chief characteristics. Those apartments at Versailles, built in the reign of Louis XV., may be considered the purest examples of this style in existence, and have served as the model for the decoration of almost every palace in Europe. Thus at Versailles do we find a palace which, containing a more magnificent collection of historical pictures than any other country possesses, is in itself a work of art, that has been called "one of the most precious glories of France."

"Je suis un palais!" dit Versailles. "Je suis un palais comme il n'en existe aucun autre dans le monde entier, quelque contrefaçon quelque imitation qu'on ait tenté de faire de moi."¹

Louis XV. died at Versailles on the 27th April 1774.

Louis XVI. lived at Versailles up to the time of the Revolution. The States General, called out in 1789, held their sittings in the town, as did also the National Assembly.

The glories of Versailles ended on the 6th October 1789, when the palace was attacked by the Revolutionists, who forced their way into the royal apartments with the intention of assassinating the king and queen. The heroic defence of the royal family on this occasion by the faithful Swiss Guard, against such fearful odds, will ever command the world's admiration. Standing firmly at their posts they were massacred almost to a man; but their resistance had checked the furious onslaught of the mob for a brief space, and the royal family had the opportunity given them of placing themselves in safety. Later in the day took place that terrible journey to Paris, which was the

¹ Philippe Gille.

commencement of those sufferings which were destined to end only on the scaffold.

From that day Versailles ceased to be a royal residence. The costly furniture and works of art which it contained were wantonly destroyed or scattered by the impious hands of the Revolutionists, who thought it necessary to exterminate even the relics of royalty. That the palace itself escaped destruction at that time is a fact greatly to be wondered at.

Napoleon, when First Consul, converted the palace into a sort of military hospital for his wounded soldiers, like the *Hôtel des Invalides* in Paris. Later on, when he had assumed the imperial title, Napoleon, who considered himself a sort of successor to the Roman emperors, was desirous of building himself a palace on purely classical lines, after the model of those of ancient Rome.

To carry out this idea it was proposed to pull down the existing palace at Versailles, and erect in its place this copy of the *Cæsars'* dwelling. Architects were invited to submit their plans for the new edifice, but the cost of erecting it was found to be so enormous that Napoleon, whose wars were exhausting the exchequer, was obliged to abandon his project. Louis XVIII. restored the palace, and it was under Louis Philippe that it became the museum as we see it to-day.

On the 18th of January 1871 there took place in the *Galerie des Glaces* at Versailles an incident which illustrated in the most striking manner to the world how uncertain is the hold of a nation upon the favours of Fortune, and how soon the sword of Victory may fall from the hand of the conqueror and pass to those who have felt the sorrow of defeat and disaster.

In 1806, Prussia, utterly subdued by the conquering armies of France was forced to accept the humiliating terms demanded by the triumphant Napoleon, the despairing request of Queen Louise that just one town should be restored to them having been refused; and after sixty-four years, had again lifted up her head and grown so strong that she in her turn sends forth mighty armies against France—armies which, sweeping everything before them in their victorious career, penetrate into the very heart of the land; and it is even in this palace of Versailles, the inmost sanctuary of the past splendour of France, that William of Prussia, the son of that same Louise who died broken-hearted at the defeat of her country, is now proclaimed, amid the shouts of the assembled princes, Emperor and Head of United Germany.

At the far end of the park of Versailles, surrounded each by its own domain, stand the two beautiful villas or miniature palaces of Trianon. The name Trianon traces back its origin to a little village called Triarum, which, from the twelfth century, formed a part of the possessions of the monastery of St. Geneviève. In 1663 Louis XIV. purchased from the monastery this village with the adjacent lands, and, after pulling down the village, built on the spot where it had stood a

little fancy château, which had five separate parts or pavilions of one story each. By a caprice of the king or his architect the outside walls of the château were decorated with blue china plaques, and on this account it was named the Trianon de Porcelaine.

In the beautiful gardens which surrounded the château the same idea of decoration was continued, the seats and benches, and the boxes in which the orange trees were planted, being encased in slabs of blue china, or painted in imitation of the same.

Louis XIV. never resided at the Trianon de Porcelaine, but often came there to spend a few hours in the course of a ride or walk, when a restful meal would be taken, followed by a saunter through the orangery or the winter garden. He also came to witness the fêtes held here from time to time; the last of these was a remarkable one, held in 1674, in celebration of his victories in the Franche Comté.

The king, to whom new diversions and amusements were a constant requirement, and who, owing to the fact, perhaps, that all his life through he had always had everything he desired, had become more and more difficult to please, discontinued in 1687 his visits to the Trianon de Porcelaine, which no longer had any attraction for him. He now wished for a château on a larger scale, and of a more convenient construction, where he could, when he fancied, take up his residence for a sojourn of some length.

Mansard was again called in, consulted with, and requested to elaborate a plan, the result of the deliberations being that the Trianon de Porcelaine was doomed to destruction, the site being considered a good one for the château it was proposed to erect.

The king, filled with the idea of his new fancy, watched the progress of the work with the greatest interest. The artists and sculptors who had achieved such wonders at Versailles now turned their attention to the Trianon, which stood completed in 1691. For nine years this château, known now as the Grand Trianon, was a source of great pleasure to Louis XIV. The visits he made to it were of frequent occurrence, and lasted often for several days, it being, no doubt, somewhat of a relief, after the vastness of Versailles, to find himself in an abode comparatively of so small a size.

During the last fifteen years of his life, from 1700 to 1715, Marly-le-roi became a favourite residence of Louis XIV., and the Trianon was for a time deserted, and not again occupied by a sovereign until the Czar, Peter the Great, stayed here for a few days when he visited France in 1717.

Louis XV. made several additions and improvements to the surroundings, establishing here a botanical garden and aviaries, in which were kept many kinds of beautiful birds. Louis XVI. took no interest in the Trianon, being too indolent to care to change his residence, when once settled at Versailles, therefore during his reign the château remained unoccupied.

At the Revolution it narrowly escaped being sold as national property ;

in fact, it was only owing to the gardener declaring that the foreign plants in the hothouses would be injured by removal, that the project was not put into execution. The beautiful furniture and works of art which filled the rooms were, however, sold and dispersed at this time.

Napoleon I. was very fond of the Trianon. He restored and refurnished it in 1805, and on several occasions resided here, bringing here his wife, the Empress Marie Louise, after their marriage in 1810.

During the reigns of Louis XVIII. and Charles X. the Grand Trianon stood empty, but Louis Philippe, after having made many alterations and additions to it, in order to render it suitable for a modern residence, proceeded to take up his abode here, accompanied by his numerous family and his Court. We are told that the furniture that one sees to-day in the Grand Trianon is not the same that was placed there in the time of Napoleon I. This was taken to Paris in 1850, and to replace it other furniture and works of art of the periods of Louis XV., Louis XVI., and of the Empire were arranged in the rooms.

The Petit Trianon was built by Louis XV. from Gabriel's designs. The king, to whom, during the later part of his reign, the ceremonious pomp which surrounded him at Versailles at times became exceedingly irksome, had longed for a little château to which to repair occasionally, in order to enjoy that privacy and quietude so difficult for the head of a great Court to obtain. The little building, which had been begun in 1762, was completed in 1768, and is the perfection of a tiny palace, beautiful in decoration and design.

Louis XV. resided much here, and it was here that the illness which was destined to prove fatal to him first laid him low.

When Louis XVI. came to the throne, he presented the little Trianon to Marie Antoinette, to whom it was the great joy and delight. She loved to throw off the severe etiquette of the Court, to surround herself with her most intimate friends, and follow her favourite pursuits and pastimes. She established a farm on the borders of the lake, consisting of several buildings, including a house for herself and the king, and great was the pleasure which she derived from the rustic occupations and amusements which it offered. She built a theatre, where, in company with other members of the royal family and her chosen friends, she took part in the comedies and light operas which she herself arranged. She gave evening fêtes, when the gardens, illuminated with thousands of lights, appeared as fairy-land to the eyes of those honoured with invitations. A notable fête was the one given by the queen in honour of her brother the Emperor Joseph of Austria when he visited the Court of France.

The Petit Trianon is so indissolubly bound up with the memory of the lovely queen, whose presence, like a shining star, cast a lustrous glory all around, that the very want of that presence creates a void and sense of desolation which does not fail to make itself apparent, for as a play without the chief actor, as a casket without the jewel, as a

landscape without the sun, so is the little Trianon without Marie Antoinette.

The sound of the distant thunderings of the surging revolutionary tide, preparing to hurl itself against the stronghold of royalty, reached the queen in the midst of the calm happiness of this charming retreat: a hurried consultation was held, a hasty farewell was said, and the daughter of Marie Therese departed for ever from what had been to her a Paradise on earth.

But beauty had not quitted the little Trianon for all time, and in a few years another lovely princess took up her abode there, in the person of Pauline Borghese, the youngest sister of Napoleon I., after her separation from the prince her husband. And once more did the gardens assume a festive air, and the sounds of music vibrate through the summer night, when on the 25th August 1811, the year of the birth of the King of Rome, the emperor gave a brilliant fête here, during which open-air scenes were acted at the pleasure village and dancing took place on the green lawns. Later on, when Louis Philippe was reigning, the little Trianon was occupied by the Duke and Duchess of Orleans.

The profound interest which the Empress Eugenie took in everything relating to Marie Antoinette—an interest which owed its origin perhaps to the fact that there were points of similarity between the two sovereigns—prompted her, at the time of the Universal Exhibition held at Paris in 1867, to collect together at the little Trianon for a short time all the relics and personalities of the queen that could be obtained from museums and private houses.

At the close of the Exhibition these things were of course removed, but there are still some interesting pieces of furniture, which have been collected and replaced as far as possible in their original positions. In the bedroom of Marie Antoinette are some beautiful little white chairs, the backs of open-work design, with her monogram. Exact copies of these chairs have been made, and can be bought in Paris.

It is a thing to be glad of that the Palace of Versailles, unlike many of the other royal châteaux in France, has suffered so little injury during the revolutions, wars, and changes of government that the country has experienced in the course of the last hundred years. During the great Revolution the palaces of Marly and Sceaux were razed to the ground, and of the former there is hardly a trace to be seen, but Versailles was practically unharmed.

We have seen how a want of funds saved it from utter destruction in the time of Napoleon I.

The war of 1870 left Saint Cloud a blackened ruin, and in the year following took place the destruction of the Tuileries by the hands of the Communists; but fortunately, during all that period of devastation, Versailles was touched by neither shell nor firebrand.

ROSAMOND CHAPLIN.

FAR EASTERN VIGNETTES

V. THE SON OF MORI

THERE is a coming and going in the house of Mori San by the moat, an air of subdued excitement which has lasted now for seven days, and which is visibly augmented on this, the naming day of Mori's little son. For here the greatest of household events has come to pass—a man-child has been born into the world. Girls are necessary and not unwelcome. History and legend alike bear witness to women's deeds of self-sacrifice and devotion. It is well to have a girl or two on hand, in training for the women's role; the two little maids, O Hidé and O Yoné, who are now playing, somewhat disconsolately, under the tall shumach trees by the well, have been welcomed and tended with no grudge or grumble, such as meets their sex in lands void of ideals. Still, a boy's coming is very different, as they too keenly feel, and the events of the last week leave them cold and bereft.

O Hidé misses the privileges of elder daughter, whose place it is to toddle about, "helping mother." O Yoné, the deposed baby, cannot understand why she no longer hangs tied snugly on the shoulders of Sada, the maid. This last is smart far beyond her wont, and full of importance. Her *kimono*, spun of silk and wool, shows sharply marked folds, to prove that it is her best, brought, for this occasion, from the depths of chest or cupboard. Her sash is, like her dress, subdued in colour, as befits her station, but its brown satin bows give an accidental glimpse here and there of a blue lining. Her tortoiseshell comb and hairpins are new and touched with gold, her foot-gear clean and white. Each day from sunrise till late at night she has ushered in guests, bowing low to touch the mats of the floor with hands and forehead; or she has received the gifts which pour in, borne by messengers in *jinrikshas* and servants on foot. Food in boxes of fine white wood or lacquer, fish and eggs, cakes and sweets of elaborate forms, clothes bright and warm for baby wear. Or toys, quaint models of temple utensils in miniature, marked with sacred symbols, tops and kites, drums and swords, all the playthings which the boy will love by-and-by. They bring animals too, modelled in rough papier-maché, the great, foolish-looking white dog, with features marked in red and black, which those who have peeped into a Japanese toy-shop know well. Each gift is tied up, as gifts must needs be, with bunches of red and white paper string, and accompanied by a thin, transparent morsel of dried fish folded in red and white paper. These things are of obligation in this land where etiquette is a religion, and manners are never idle, but have a force almost sacramental. The maid fails in no detail,

neither does her mistress. Pale she may be, and weak, with a quiver that tells of tension in her smile, as she reclines all day long on the mats, propped up by folded quilts. It is her duty to receive her guests, to express gratitude for their congratulations, and to deprecate in set phrases of humility their equally set phrases of compliment; and it is by duty that her whole life is ruled.

The relations are gathered to-day in family council. The baby is their baby, not Mori San's or the mother's only. The grandmother, rendered old beyond her years by the blackened teeth and shaven head that mark the matron and widow, holds the child, who lies in her arms quiet and placid in his soft bright garments, peeping out with shining black eyes on a world which is all kindly, if over full of commotion.

The father, released from his not too arduous work as school secretary, stands by, with a benevolent smile which is half for his mother and half for his heir, and—while incense curls up before the ancestral tablets and the images of the *Kami* on the shelf—the grandmother gives voice to the family resolve that the boy's name shall be Kintaro—that is, Kin, the elder brother. The name is written carefully on a wooden tablet; Mori San is a noted scribe, and his Chinese characters, always admirable, surpass themselves in this inscription, which, the tablet being securely tied round the baby's waist, may be read by all men through the years of his childhood and school life. It will be changed later for one accounted more manly, and yet again, probably, to fit the change of status wrought by death.

This business ended, the guests refresh themselves with fish and with red rice, a paste of rice and red beans, which is carefully prepared for all festive occasions. They drink warm *saki* and cooled tea from the tiniest of delicate cups: then, with much bowing and reiterated expressions of good-will, they take their leave.

At last all is quiet in and about the house by the moat. Sada comforts the little girls with cakes and *yokan*, the tired mother clasps her baby to her breast with a sense of possession which is sweet, and her rest is pleasant to her. So there is a pause till the thirtieth day, during which time Mori San's wife (she is never other than daughter, wife, mother, of some one, with a sweet flower name for strictly family use) sets herself to the task of repairing her strength, with all too little aid from without, but with the effectual force of will which results from a trained self-surrender.

From its birth a Japanese child is placed under the protection of some Shinto god. The two religions of Japan, Shinto and Buddhism, blent and mingled as they are in the popular mind and practices, differ in their root idea. The Buddhist holds that humanity, essentially imperfect, must be gradually raised and purified, while Shinto teaches that innate perfection exists from the beginning, soiled and warped though it may be by adverse forces from without. Belief in the efficacy of prayer, and in the help to be obtained by it from source

more or less divine, is common to both religions. Still one must speculate as to how far the marked characteristics of the Japanese individuality may have their source in the Shinto idea.

Mori San is a Buddhist, so he tells us, as the least offensive way of intimating that he is strongly opposed to Christianity, but there is no such distinctive Buddhism as will allow him to ignore the ceremony of dedication to the *Kami*, souls of men that are as gods and alive for evermore; gods that are the souls of things by us accounted inanimate, trees and rivers, winds and tempests, mercy and pity, wealth and luck. Such are the Shinto *Kami*, and to the special protection of one or more of these must the young Kintaro be committed. On the thirtieth day the mother dresses herself in her freshest and best *kimono*, not of necessity the newest, for the more valuable of these garments are often heirlooms. This is of silk, of a delicate dove colour, girt with a rich *obi* of black satin, and relieved at the neck by soft folds of white crape, from which gleam the diamonds of a pretty brooch.

The little girls are radiant in red-flowered *kimono* of crape, with the brightest of sashes, peeps of pink and yellow, under green, blue, lilac—all the tints that can be got in. From their hair hang streamers of gold and silver tinsel, fastened by sprays of cherry blossom. Their little pink feet are thrust into the finest of straw sandals, and they grasp the strap firmly with toes which gleam with gilding on the nails. More gold, mixed with carmine, is on their lips, and their faces are white with powder. O Sada San pulls out the sashes and re-touches the gilding, then dons, over her holiday raiment, a great bib, or pouch, of scarlet crape, and in it the mother places the child, who lies there aglow with colour. Mori San has discarded the frock-coat which he affects in his official hours, and gains greatly by the exchange to his black gauze *kimono*, with his crest stamped in white on back and shoulder.

Two wide *jinrikshas* wait; they are hung round with the new toys, and still farther decorated with small flags and zigzag streamers of paper—*gohei*, the sacred symbols of Shinto. Into the first of these climb the mother and nurse with the child, the next contains Mori San and the two little girls, in others relations and dependants follow. These carry offerings of food and cloth for the priests of the temple. As they drive through the crowded streets people turn with a smile or a kindly word for the happy little procession.

Coming to the temple gateway they dismount and form in line, passing under massive *torii* and climbing the steep flight of granite steps, which seem, to some of the less robust, to be well-nigh endless.

Arrived at the top they cross the wide courtyard, all shaded by cryptomeria and sazae trees, pausing to dip their fingers in the cleansing waters of the stone tank which stands in the centre, sheltered by a canopy and hung round with votive offerings, blue and white towels with some text or sacred symbol stamped on each. Going on, under more *torii* of stone, or of red lacquer, dim and faded, they come to the front of the temple, where the knotted straw rope hangs, which

being pulled by the worshippers, rings a bell to call the attention of the *Kami*.

The priest meets them there, robed in long white vestments, with a stiff, peaked black cap on his head. O Sada San stands in the centre of the group, supporting Kintaro in her crape bib, while another maid holds an umbrella over the pair. There is a hush of expectation, broken only by the little Yoné's all too audible remark to the effect that the priest is a very funny old man. This expression of opinion being promptly quelled, the gifts are presented and an attendant carries them away to the inner sanctuary. Then follow many prayers, offered by the priest in a chant full of the strangest inflections, while he waves a brush, or "horse tail," of fine strands of paper over and about the child.

With clasped hands and bowed heads the parents whisper their petitions, the bearing of all is earnest and devout. The friends carry the white dogs and other toys, while one holds the rods with the sacred *gohei*. After a time the priest retires to the sanctuary, and the quiet prayers go on till he returns presently, bearing a lacquer pot which contains *beni*, the delicate salve of carmine and gold which girls use to tint their lips. The nurse, happy, important O Sada San! holds up the child, and the priest marks on his forehead with the *beni* a large circle, inside it a cross, the *Manji*, a mystic symbol claimed by Buddhism, but probably, like other possessions of that creed, adopted from older systems which it has replaced.

After more chanted prayers the assistants bring from a side chapel one of the stands of white, unpainted wood which are used for offerings. On it is food, rice in various forms, *daikon*—a sort of sauerkraut of radish—cakes and sweets. With these, aided by the father and nurse, the priest goes through some ceremonial form of feeding the child, after which he brings a long, inscribed bag containing *amé*, a preparation of malt which, like rice, is taken as typical of food in general. This is ceremonially presented to the child, and on his back is fastened the charm bag, with a holy text inscribed within it, from which he may never be parted while the days of his childhood last.

The priest marks each fold of the *gohei* with the red stamp of the temple, and Kintaro is now dedicated, with the food he is to eat and the possessions he is to own, to the *Kami* to whom the temple is sacred.

And so they move away with the same happy stir, a little subdued by the solemnity of the rite and the fatigue of the long way. Back to the house by the moat, to begin the easy, happy child life, which is yet not without its discipline of ordered custom, and subjection to very definite rules of conduct.

I. RANKEN.

IN THE WIND

BY J. CUTHBERT HADDEN

SO poor Sims Reeves has passed to his rest. What memories of the good old times his name calls up! I have fought my way through many a crowd to hear him, only to learn when I got inside the concert-room that he was suddenly "indisposed." This was such a common experience that people began to hint darkly that the great tenor had become too fond of the bottle. There was not the slightest ground for such an aspersion. As a matter of fact, Sims Reeves's glorious voice would never have lasted half the time it did if it had been subjected to the influence of stimulants; and as a rule the "indisposition" amounted to very little more than this, that the unrivalled tenor would not sing unless he knew himself to be in first-rate form. He told me once that these "indispositions" had cost him something like £20,000, and you may reasonably suppose that a man does not throw away £20,000 upon a mere indiscretion. My only regret about Mr. Sims Reeves is that he did not do more for really classical music. It is true that he appeared, and appeared with success, in all three departments of opera, oratorio, and ballad. But he was essentially a ballad singer. Moreover, he always sang the same ballads. Go to hear Sims Reeves and you might be sure you would get "The Death of Nelson," "Tom Bowling," "My Pretty Jane," and "Come into the Garden, Maud." He stuck to what Mr. Lang's "man in the street" would call the "good old English song," and stuck to it, too, with a persistency which was almost pathetic. I do not believe that he ever publicly sang one of Schumann's, or yet Schubert's, or even Mendelssohn's songs during his whole career. The tow-row-row, the gone aloft, the woodbine spices, the Arethusa, the England, home, and beauty species of ditty—that was the kind of thing we always had from Sims Reeves. There is a big public for it, no doubt, and Mr. Sims Reeves found—and lost—a fortune in it, but it is not art. The "good old songs" are all well enough in their way, but the great singer should, like the well-instructed scribe, be prepared to bring forth out of his treasure-house things new as well as old. It may seem very ungenerous to say all this, but I am with Sterne in his view of the *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* dictum. One's opinion must follow the evidence.

* * *

My compliments to Mr. Ashby-Sterry, the cheery Bystander of the *Graphic*. Mr. Ashby-Sterry does not see that there is any merit in getting out of bed about the same time as "the early village cock."

Neither do I. Of course I know all about the old maxim according to which a man is sure to be healthy, wealthy, and wise if he goes early to bed and comes early out of it. But I don't believe in the maxim one little bit. Nor have I any respect for the venturesome early bird who catches the worm. There is sure to be more than one worm, and if there weren't, the bird might as well have his worm before retiring to rest. Lord Jeffrey used to say that "morning, except before going to bed, is horrid," and he knew what he was talking about. I have great respect for Dr. Johnson—"the rudest man in all England," says one of the characters in a recent novel—but I have never been able to understand why he should get up at an unearthly hour to read Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy." He might as well have read it comfortably in bed, with his arms through a couple of holes in the blankets, after the manner of Jemmie Thomson, the poet of the Seasons. The truth is, that getting up early in the morning is quite an unnatural business. If it were not, people who go in for the practice would not prate so much about it. I read in a medical journal lately that if a man desires to rise about the time that Falstaff would have thought of retiring, his arteries must have got hardened and his "vasomotor system" out of working order. I have not the slightest idea as to what my vasomotor system is, but I see now that when a man boasts to me of being even with chanticleer in the matter of early hours, I ought to express sympathy with him. Something is clearly wrong with his vasomotor system, and he is as much to be pitied as the man who makes a virtue of a vegetarian diet.

* * *

A very interesting question is raised by Miss M. E. Coleridge in a recent volume of small-talk. Miss Coleridge wants to know why the broken nose is such a rare thing in imaginative literature. In other words, why don't novelists who get their characters into all sorts of scrapes, get them now and again a broken nose? Up to our own day such an accident was as rigorously excluded from the domain of fiction as an attack of the mumps; and even now, according to Miss Coleridge, it is only that iconoclast, George Meredith, who dares to break the nose of one of his heroes. Indeed, Wilfrid Pole, the character upon whom this outrage is committed, hardly counts as a hero at all; and probably Miss Coleridge is right in her assertion that such a thing could never have happened to Richard Feverel or to Evan Harrington. I am bound to say that I have not paid sufficient attention to the noses of fiction to know whether any other than Mr. Meredith has dared to upset the dignity of a hero by breaking his beak. But I should think Miss Coleridge is within the mark. The nose is the rudder of the face, and it would be very difficult to respect a man who had been so unfortunate as to get its contour seriously disturbed. I should certainly hesitate before lending him a ten-pound note. At the same time, I don't see why we should be bothered with noses at all. So far

as I can make out, they are nothing better than conveniences for head colds and outstanding attractions for summer flies.

* * *

What's in a name? A great deal, assuredly, Juliet notwithstanding. We all know the view which Mr. Shandy, senior, took of the subject. People's actions and character, he contended, were very materially influenced by their names. I don't know that they are, though there was a very good reason why Laurence Sterne should put such a theory into the mouth of Mr. Shandy, in the fact that one of his brothers had been christened Joram and another Devijeher. You can hardly imagine a man called Joram Jones doing anything to excite the respectful attention of his fellow-mortals. One could never make a heroic General out of a John Smith (I offer my apologies to the great family of Smith), and I doubt if it would be possible to create a reputation as a philosopher under the name of Timothy Twopenny. These remarks are suggested by the astonishing announcement made the other day that Mr. John Dunn, our greatest British violinist, is henceforward to be known as Ivan Donoiewski! It almost takes one's breath away. To be sure there are many notable precedents. Long ago Signor Coperario emerged out of plain Mr. Cooper; and in our own time we have had a Scots Campbell blossoming into a Campobello, and an Irish Foley—a piece of folly, truly—into a Foli, both with the lordly prefix of the Italian. But one had thought that the common sense of the later days of the century had effectually rooted out this silly affectation. If you have an ill-sounding or an absolutely ridiculous patronymic, it may be expedient to convert it into something dignified and euphonious—I confess I prefer Henry Irving to Henry Brodribb—but this practice of turning the good old English Mr. into Herr, and Signor, and Monsieur, with an appropriate transformation of the surname to follow, is one which can only excite the contempt of all sensible people. Dr. Joseph Parker said once that he could preach better in light than in heavy boots; but I am not aware that anybody sings or plays better by calling himself out of the name he received at the baptismal font. He need not be ashamed of his nationality at any rate.

* * *

The *Musical Times* has been writing lightly and learnedly about the wives of the great composers. On the whole, the wives come tolerably well out of it. The world is inclined to be severe on women, especially upon married women, and no one is easier to libel than the wife of a genius. Geniuses are for the most part "gey ill to get on with," as Carlyle's mother said of her Tom, and I have never been quite able to decide whether they ought to marry at all. Certainly no woman could have borne Handel's fits of ungovernable temper, and I don't know that Beethoven would have given points to any poet who wanted to rhyme about love at home.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that some wives of musical geniuses have played the Xantippe on their husbands only too successfully. Our own Purcell, it is said, contracted his fatal illness from having been purposely locked out in the cold because he didn't come home to Mrs. Purcell betimes. Perhaps in that case the composer was rightly served. I do not advocate late hours and latch-keys for husbands. But take Haydn's wife, the barber's Anna Maria. Fancy a composer's wife committing the incredible crime of using his manuscript scores for curling paper, or as underlays for the pastry. Nor was this the worst of Anna Maria's faults. When Haydn went from home she would send him the most cheerful little notes. "Should you die to-day or to-morrow" ran one of these missives, "there is not enough money left in the house to bury you." At another time, when Haydn was in London, he received a letter in which Anna Maria wrote that she had just seen a neat little house which she liked very much, and that he might do himself the pleasure to send her two thousand gulden with which to buy it, so as to have in the future a "widow's house." Pleasant reading this for the genial composer! Is it any wonder that he sought consolation from the society of other ladies? Sir Thomas Browne says quaintly that "the silent note which Cupid strikes is far sweeter than the sound of an instrument." It was clearly not so with Haydn and his Anna Maria.

* * *

There is a valuable hint for the medical profession in the suggestion of a writer in one of the monthlies, that novelists who want to introduce medical statements into their stories should employ young doctors as coaches. If we may put our faith in the writer in question, there is certainly need for some guidance of the kind. Novelists, it appears, in addition to the absolutely false statements which they make in regard to diseases—a case of "dancing marrow of the spine" is mentioned—show a singular lack of variety in the matter of the ailments by which they cut off their characters. Heart disease, brain fever, and the bursting of blood-vessels are used almost exclusively; whereas it is pointed out that some of the forms of nervous prostration, pneumonia, and certain other ills would be far more useful for the novelists' purpose. Thus in pneumonia, where the ten days' course of the trouble may bring either raving delirium, or stupor, or leave the patient in complete possession of his senses, the novelist has the opportunity of either cutting off his evildoer without leaving him a moment for repentance, or of making his readers sit by an edifying death-bed. On the whole, I should be inclined to favour the nervous prostration, particularly if brought on at the end. The improbabilities of novelists are often objected to, but there can be nothing improbable about a hero or a heroine breaking down under the storm and stress of three hundred odd pages of close print.

NIGHTFALL

TWO SONNETS

I

THE EARTH

PALE, patient, with her throbbing heart at rest,
Waiting with half closed, half expectant eyes,
Till slumber's lips shall cleave in pitying wise,
Full of sweet comfort to her brows and breast,
She feels by one and one in the bright West
Fade the long trails of gold, and wavering shades
Leap from lone forests and forgotten glades,
And dance and shimmer at the moon's behest.

What change is on the fields?—the old known land
Spreads, by some goddess of the twilight planned,
A cloudy world of formless trees and flowers,
Where with cool hands the placid gardener, night,
Waters the blossoms of the pale moonlight
With quiet dews of unregarded hours.

II

THE SKY

How far, how far, with unavailing eye
Shall the frail sight grasp night's significance,
Or pierce the trackless, terrible expanse,
The vast and awful desert of the sky?
If all the labouring world in one vast sigh
Melted and vanished from its ancient place,
Would any ripple stir the seas of Space,
Or one least echo sorrow in reply?

Oh Hand, which through a shuddering chaos hurled,
Star upon endless star and world on world,
Will thy dread sowing spring to harvest soon?

Now pregnant with the thoughts of æons past,
Through those unblossoming fields and pastures vast,
The evident face of Silence, dawns the moon.

MARGARET SACKVILLE.

EDITORIAL NOTES

THE Collected Poems of T. E. Brown" lie before me. Strange that a man, lately dead, should achieve this reputation thus suddenly! Men of wide reading and broad sympathies knew all about the good Manx poet long ago. They understood his aims and they treasured his utterances, knowing that both were out of the common—knowing that his was to be something more than a local fame. Sometimes a voice would be lifted to praise him as he deserved. But it is only now that he is gone that there comes to us, from the house of Macmillan, uniform with the works of Tennyson, and bound in the same familiar green covers, at the price of seven shillings and sixpence, this most delectable of volumes. What an admirable Christmas present will it make for any lover of good books! I called T. E. Brown "good"; I had almost written "great"; and yet I remember that when the poet himself read a certain famous article (by Mr. Traill) in one of the reviews, enumerating the "sixty-six minor living poets" of Britain, he found that his own name was not even mentioned. "*Am I one of the greater poets, I wonder?*" was his half-jesting query. In fact it was so, and he knew it; but his modesty was proved by that lifelong devotion to schoolmastering which kept him working at Clifton to the end.

* * *

Yes; I think that a copy of this volume of poems would make a splendid Christmas present. In the first place, Brown was a grand Christian writer. Take his lines:—

"A GARDEN is a lovesome thing, God wot!
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Ferned grot—
The veriest school
Of peace; and yet the fool
Contentds that God is not—
Not God! in gardens! when the eve is cool?
Nay, but I have a sign;
'Tis very sure God walks in mine."

And Brown, who could thus crystallise his faith in lines that will hardly be forgotten, could none the less throw himself with a wonderful freedom into the life of village folk, whose unconscious irreverence he would not hesitate to transfer to his pages if that course should aid the effectiveness of his picture. So that in the next place to his excellence of religious fervour we ought to place his humanity. What need of

more? For by these we shall find the poet's field is covered. His poem, "Roman Women," is one to be learnt by heart; his "Epistola ad Dakyns" is a magnificent, sustained, noble piece of work. The poems that deal with children are, perhaps, the most beautiful of all. The only thing we have to regret is that much of Brown's work is local in spirit. Yet even here humour and vigour carry all before them. Beyond them lie the tenderness and the beauty of many poems, too long to be quoted here, and only to be read, with justice, in their entirety. May the audience already won by this great-hearted writer grow larger with every Christmastide!

* * *

Another book which should lie on many tables this Christmas is "The Mantle of Elijah" (Heinemann, 6s.). Mr. Zangwill is a writer whose eminence is already recognised. He is one of the few serious authors now concerned in the production of novels. Those who consider the art of fiction-weaving to be merely that of telling a story which shall render tolerable the idlest hours of mediocre people, will not care very much for the methods of Mr. Zangwill; for he takes Art as seriously as he takes Life, and indeed it is Life that he is depicting, as well as he knows how to do it. Take this book, for instance. The story covers a period of twenty years—a long time for a modern novel. This is a step in the right direction. We may now look forward, by the aid of Mr. Zangwill, to the spacious limits which such writers as Dickens and Thackeray took quite as a matter of course. Then, again, you have in the volumes which come from Mr. Zangwill's pen the qualities which go to the making of good books in any branch of literature; for you have matter, and you have style. How often do the people who can tell a story omit to consider the excellences involved in the due ordering of language, without which the best of stories is pain and misery to read! The stylist, on the other hand, who is so concerned with his embroidery that he forgets the material of which his stuff is woven, and so the amount of adornment it will bear, becomes an even greater nuisance to the world at large. But the strength of Mr. Zangwill lies mainly in this power of uniting a good story with a genuine style; and here, in "The Mantle of Elijah," you may see him carefully subordinating the political interest of his tale to the human and domestic side of it, and giving a picture of life in England during an earlier part of this present reign, all the stronger and more interesting to us who read it because it has been studied by the mind of one who sees with the eyes of the present generation. Mr. Zangwill, too, has humour of the deeper kind. His characters speak wittily when the occasion serves, but always in a way which helps the action; they do not indulge in the pastime, now growing absurdly common among novelists, of letting off intellectual fireworks. In a word, Mr. Zangwill is sincere. And that means that "The Mantle of Elijah" is a work

not only worth reading, but worthy also of being studied, if only as a sample of what our much-abused novelists are capable of doing.

* * *

Having said a few words concerning books by authors whose standing is secured, I should like to add some lines of commendation regarding the work of one whose name is not as yet well known, to whom, perhaps, we may take the opportunity of wishing rather the actual acceptance obtained by a Zangwill, than the posthumous popularity which no doubt accrues to a Brown. (Not that popularity is anything: and yet it has its joys!) In "A Tragedy of Errors" (George Allen, 6s.), Miss Geraldine Hodgson gives us a very remarkable character-study. The story is of the simplest. As its title indicates, it is very decidedly in the minor key. Northern skies give us the atmosphere suited to a series of episodes determined mainly by the grim character of a single individual. At the beginning we are confronted with the household of a clergyman just widowed: his wife lies even now dead in the house. Even his grief is disturbed by the sinister Puritanism that rules his own and his sister's life—the kill-joy principles of unswerving severity which are to keep him miserable through all, hard though he fight against them, and in the end to bring ruin on his home. Here it is that the uncommon power of Miss Hodgson's work is made manifest. The sunny nature of Griselda, her child-heroine; the fun, the caprice, but the weakness also of her temperament—all are clear as the day. You will smile at Griselda, even through the tears of the "Tragedy." But it is Miss Vibart, the Dragon, the Fury, of the scheme, who compels attention from the first page to the last. Consistently devised, the story flows on without let or hindrance to its appointed end. "A Tragedy of Errors" is a book to be remembered. I would compare the impression made by it on my mind to that made by Miss Harraden's "Ships that Pass in the Night." Higher praise it would be hard indeed to bestow.

* * *

I have to thank Messrs. Raphael Tuck & Sons, the well-known Art Publishers, for the opportunity of speaking some words of praise concerning that which needs no praise at this time of day. In bewildering variety the beautiful Christmas and New Year's cards produced by this enterprising firm come to us year after year. It is difficult to do them justice. Inventors and designers in Messrs. Tuck's service seem to have "exhausted worlds, and then imagined new." The perfect finish and delicacy of every separate piece of work are such that mere words will not describe them. If this should be my last opportunity of recommending them, it will not be the last time that you will purchase them, for assuredly they will be represented by samples even more beautiful as the years roll by.

THE EDITOR.

